ELIZABETH MARGARET
(GREENE)
ARNOLD FUND

ROBERT LORAINE

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ROBERT.

From a portrait by Charles Buchel, 1919.

HEAD WIND

The Story of Robert Loraine

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by

WINIFRED LORAINE

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In memory:
and for three daughters.

You strip from me the laurel and the rose! Take all! Despite you there is yet one thing I hold against you all . . . my PANACHE.

(Rostand *Cyrano de Bergerac.*)

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PART ONE

In the Days of His Youth

CHAPTER I

TROOPER Robert Loraine—number 8175 of the Imperial Montgomeryshire Yeomanry—bit into hot toast, and boiled egg between long draughts of strong tea. High tea was always his favourite meal, and to-day it was particularly good for he had every reason to feel pleased. His legs were thrown over the arm of one easy chair, his body was sunk in another, a February fire roared up the chimney and he was 'at ease' after having beaten the drill instructor at handsprings on the parade-ground that afternoon.

Loraine always liked to be to the fore and his demonstration of cartwheels had held up the class. The old Sergeant noticing this had said: "8175! you're as good as a circus. Now, let's see you clown it bareback on a horse."

A smile passed over the faces of fox-hunting recruits. Most of these Boer War Volunteers were hard riders, but Trooper Robert Loraine was an actor and could scarcely keep in his stirrups. His riding afforded them much amusement.

A horse was brought over from a gun-team unhooked close by; the saddle was taken off, the Sergeant found a whip; up went Loraine and off went the horse. Until the last moment 8175 had worn his jolly smirk, but now his face set in grey lines as he was pitched on to the horse's neck and forced to clutch wildly on to the mane. Fellow-troopers went into hysterics, they whistled and shouted: "Fall off by the tail—Grip with your knees, man—Yah-yah then, bite into the mane, bite into the mane."

Instruction over the ground came to a standstill as every one turned to watch. Round and round went Loraine, tossed first over one side and then over the other, spreadeagled but still on, thanks to the wonderful mane. The horse seemed to go naturally in circles. He was in his fifth round, the Sergeant's whip cracking louder, the horse going faster, a fall imminent,

when suddenly the animal shivered to a stop, went down on its knees and rolled gently over.

The Sergeant forgot to swear and ran towards them. "I didn't tell yer to throw the 'oss, did I ?" he demanded. Loraine got up unhurt, and looked at the animal which lay perfectly still. Even when the Sergeant prodded it, the horse remained still. It was an uncanny experience.

Over came a Sergeant from the gun-team and whisked it to its feet. "This 'ere is a trick 'oss," he explained severely, "speshully presented to the Regiment. And I'll thank you, Sergeant, not to come foraging among my mounts next time you wish to break in a recruit."

"By gum, that's odd," exclaimed Loraine to a friend, who had rushed up to ask if he were hurt. "Did you hear that—a trick horse! The only time I was ever on a horse before I came here, was on that trick charger at Drury Lane. You remember, in *The Great Ruby*. It reared up and rolled backwards over me at the end of the play, directly I pressed hard on its second rib. I must have pressed my knee unconsciously on the same place . . . What luck and how odd!"

He gave no explanation to the other troopers who surged round him, and although they were eager to know how he had done it and quite ignorant of the real facts, they dared not press him with questions because Loraine was such a queer chap, so quick with his fists and easily offended, you never knew where you were with him. For all his good humour and camaraderie, he bristled with susceptibilities, and whatever his mood, you had to fall in with it. You were noisy, if he were gay; stopped horseplay, if he were serious. Even when he was reeling off poetry you listened. He did it well, of course, but it was clear the fellow suffered from seeing life too much as d'Artagnan.

He had come from playing the part in London, where he had won great success in it. Then he was himself, in many ways, a natural d'Artagnan. He had the same nerve and exuberance ; the same belief in the unlikely that had made the unlikely come true for him; the same reckless determination to live every moment to its highest pitch. He enjoyed what-

ever he did: had made it a rule only to undertake that which he was likely to enjoy. Such vitality was rare even in those days: to-day it has all but disappeared.

Officers frankly disliked the man. There was an implied taunt in his independence, swagger in the line of his shoulder. But for all his deficiencies as a marksman and a rider, he was proving knowledgeable with a machine-gun, and was the only recruit who could last out a long march with the Sergeants. Sergeants were the only Regulars in the Montgomeryshire Yeomanry: so there was no fault to find with Loraine as a soldier.

Fellow-troopers either resented him as a show-off or thought he was the finest fellow going. There was no denying his magnetism. His sense of fun made him a boon companion, until something happened to offend him; then everything went the other way round, and pals sorrowfully admitted that no two people could be so different as Bob sweet and Bob murderous.

He could be unmitigatedly selfish and callous, or equally sympathetic and helpful : brutal or warm-hearted. And there was no one to check him in any of his impulses because no one dared gainsay him.

This wasn't because he was so robust (he weighed barely ten stone and was not quite five foot ten high), but because he never gave a thought to consequences. Such a man was obviously dangerous. Once a much heavier trooper had come after him with a horse-whip and been flung downstairs, incurring a broken shoulder. Bob had turned on him regardless of the horsewhip, contemptuous of punishment. After that, word went round his gun-section: " Let Loraine speak first, and take him as you find him."

But the truly surprising thing about this fellow was his gratitude if you could give him a piece of real information. He was born curious, and for all his rough readiness was a deeply reflective person: an artist as well as a man of action.

"'E's just about as changeable as a woman," grumbled the Sergeant, one day when Loraine had complained that no privacy could be obtained in barracks. "I'd like to know what

girlie will do with his private dressing-room on the veldt," he went on, stabbing up notices on the board. Troopers around laughed. At this moment Bob appeared. They tittered again, as, with his cap slapped on the side of his head, his face might easily have been a girl's. His hair would wave and he had a sensitive mouth. "What's the joke?" he inquired, briskly stepping up, the well-known cloud about to descend over his bright blue eyes.

"No joke," replied the Sergeant, stiffly. "You're next on the list Loraine, for stable-fatigue."

8175 turned on his heel. It was an aggravating turn, expressing all he felt; but he did not grumble. He made it a rule never to kick at routine as he was there to learn to be a soldier. But after this particular stable-cleaning, he found it necessary to take rooms out of barracks and live at the Black Horse Hotel, Welshpool. It was the only pub in the town that could provide him with an adequate bath. So, there he was, soldiering at a cost of 15s. a day on his pay of 2s. as a trooper.

Leastways, it should have been 2s., but the Paymaster had just cut it down to 10d. a day, and remitted the remaining 1s. 2d to Loraine's wife.

This, of course, was pure nonsense. What would Julie Opp do with 1s. 2d. a day when she was earning £25 a week in a long run at the St. James's Theatre with George Alexander? She would send it back. She would be too proud, he thought, to take his money, now that they had parted.

Much he knew: Julie took her daily 1s. 2d. right through the War, and Bob was soon to find himself in difficulties owing to lack of funds. This was strange when her income as a picture post-card beauty was large, quite apart from what she earned as an actress.

It had been a curious marriage: according to their friends, a typical 'Bobbie Loraine' marriage. Not that their friends dared mention it to him, because he never mentioned it to them. But although Julie and he had been wedded for close on three years, it is doubtful whether the marriage had ever been consummated.

To start from the beginning. They had met Ruritanianly

when she was playing a Court lady in the *Prisoner of Zenda*, and he was playing a Courtier. Six months later he had soared to playing Rupert of Hentzau in the production and was marked as London's coming juvenile lead; while she had been engaged by an American manager to appear in New York as second lead in Pinero's *Princess and the Butterfly*.

She told him of her good fortune one night when he was dashing on stage, buckling on his sabre. Luminous and lovely, she stood in front of a long mirror in the wings fixing her frills. "London or New York, wherever you go, you'll be my star," he assured her romantically. "Why don't we make London and New York ours?" her deep voice inquired. Julie had murmured, but it was as though the roof had fallen in. He could scarcely believe his ears—and was all but late for his cue on stage.

She saw they made a couple to draw New York and London. He saw only her . . . white and shimmering against his uniform of a Black Hussar. . . . and became determined to secure her for wife before she sailed.

He courted her. She succumbed. She married him at a Registry Office two days before she left for America. Bob was then 21, she was some seven years older. She made him idyllically happy during those two days by being his wife just in name; she wished no contretemps to disturb her engagement in New York and he deferred to her wishes because he worshipped her—how he worshipped her—she was away in America some eighteen months, and her worshipping Bob left her the night she returned.

In this, as in other actions, there never was any accounting for Bob. He hurt no-one but himself. Julie soon recovered, but the smashing of their no-partnership shattered him completely, morally and financially, for some time. He had spent every penny he'd earned while she was away, on fitting up a little house for her at Staines. The place was slightly beyond easy reach of London, but that was *nothing* as it faced the actual bend in the river where he had proposed to her on the Sunday following the mirror vision in the *Prisoner of Zenda*.

Poor sentimental Bob ! That river-bend had become quite

hallowed for him during her eighteen months absence. Months in which so much happened: enough even to satisfy the burning ambition of youth. They had both climbed rather faster than is good for any one. Her post-cards began to sell second only to Lily Langtry's. He became the star and hit of two Drury Lane melodramas, the finest productions of their day. Wherever he played, his name was up in lights : there was no other juvenile to touch him in voice, manner and looks; there was nothing ahead to stop him from rising to the place where he belonged, and he let his imagination range, lit by success, love and glorious hopes of her.

Two long play-runs allowed him to become more lavish in his decorations of the little house at Staines. He hung it with the frailest mauve and saffron curtains, her favourite pastel shades; splashed it with cushions of his preferred buttercup yellow; kept altering it to include further comforts as, in spite of a capacity for enduring hardship, Bob liked to do himself well. When he had finished, the river-side home was luxurious.

Foolishly, he had never asked her where she wished to live. The place was to be a surprise gift. It was sufficient that he saw her in his mind's eye picking roses on the bank, and that it faced their particular river-bend. Julie, on the other hand, knew nothing about this, had no thought of picking roses, was coming back to London determined to confirm the success she had made in New York. To this end she proposed living in the heart of theatre-land: lunching daily with managers; and landing star-contracts. These seemingly opposite views could have been reconciled, for Bob had always known her as an actress, but unfortunately they took shape inimically on the very first night.

Bob met her at Southampton, brought her to London, and took her to Staines after his evening performance. They reached it in the early hours of next morning. No doubt whatever, that her spirits flagged during the halting train journey—district connections were not well linked in 1899—but *as this was to be their wedding night*, she dissembled gaily until he entered her room. What happened then, no one will

ever know. Evidence has it that he came out five minutes later, dressed himself in a whirlwind, strode from the house and never saw her again.

He would never discuss what took place. So the tale is handed down from Julie for if Bob kept silent, Julie let it be widely known that he had wished to bury her in the country; when she had remonstrated and asked him how they could hope to work in London and make good, living so far out, his manner had become most odd. He had changed from her 'sweet solicitous Bob' to stone; had given her one look, rounded on his heel and left the room. A few minutes later, before she had any idea of what was happening, she had heard footsteps in the garden and called him—for she was frightened—only to hear the footsteps fade and die away, and learn he had left her alone in the house in the middle of the night, without a word.

Tales of his brutality to her spread through the theatre: he never attempted to stop them. Always reticent about his private affairs, he rarely sought the advice of friends, and this time his lips were firmly closed for his pride had been too deeply hurt. Those who knew him understood the cold douche Julie's common-sense must have given his romanticism. Poor Bob! It must have been a shock. But what a queer fellow he was, to cut her out like that, when she was such a beautiful woman. Ah well, as he was such an idealist and autocrat, they supposed no other course was possible.

Cut her out he might: forget her, he could not. All summer he was like a bear with a sore head. He had loved Julie. He had planned for her; then she had come home and he had seen she was not for him. He had broken. At no time did he say a word against the woman he had loved. Perhaps he had no cause. Perhaps he preferred to keep her as an ideal wrapped in veils of illusion; reality was barren, illusion comforting. So all summer he worked hard, as a star in *One of the Best*, a melodrama in which he was a Black Watch hero, spy and renegade in one. The part was moving, his performance touching, his appearance irresistible; laurels were accumulating, but his pockets were empty. For, irony of

ironies, Julie was still living at Staines and even acting from there.

She told her friends how exquisite was the little house and situation. Why hadn't she told him? He was footing the upkeep of his dream lodge like any truly married man, and meeting his own expenses in town. Julie might have considered a reconciliation; but a reconciliation on the grounds of expediency never occurred to him, nor would he have entertained the suggestion. So he went on playing, and paying, and getting the better of it, until distraction came with the autumn.

Then there was a world sensation.

The thunder-cloud that had been hovering between England and South Africa detonated into the Boer War. At the same moment the London Theatre burst into rival productions of *The Three Musketeers*, Beerbohm Tree's at His Majesty's and Lewis Waller's at the Garrick.

Both events profoundly influenced Bob's career.

To take the lesser first: as soon as Tree's *Musketeers* began to flag, the great man summoned Waller to appear in it, by virtue of some former contract; although Tree still retained his own part as d'Artagnan. This move was meant to close Waller's production at the Garrick, but Waller sent for Bob Loraine, who was ideally suited to d'Artagnan and gave him the part. The resulting publicity set the town by the ears; people flocked to see both shows. Tree was not happily cast as d'Artagnan; but it was no mean feat for an actor of twenty-three to be set up and win out against him, as Tree was already a runner-up to Sir Henry Irving. Comet-wise, Bob had rocketed into the firmament of great stars. It was said that the old who saw his d'Artagnan came out with their youth temporarily restored, while the young became foolhardy.

His course was set, or would have been in the case of any other actor. But the devil of unrest had taken hold of Bob. Every night as he walked home, in spite of the exhilaration of his part, the Government's call for recruits dinned in his ears. And he was not alone in hearing that call. England had been severely shaken by the Boer victory of Magersfontein: the Cabinet had issued an appeal for volun-

teers, and from all parts of the country, squires, grocers, clubmen, little men and big men rushed forward to enlist. Each disaster, and there were three in a week—Magersfontein, Stormberg, Colenso—brought a fresh surge to arms. England was stricken with fright: people could talk of nothing but the Boer War, and talk of it in a way in which, should the earth start to fall towards the sun to-day, they would talk of the end of the world.

To stay out of the fight seemed to Bob to be disgracing his manhood. Could he watch safely from the side while England was beaten by a handful of farmers and the Empire went to bits? But, argued fellow-actors, if he threw up his part as d'Artagnan now, just as he had made his name, and left the show, his career would be ruined. And for what? Merely to be shot in some remote corner of the South African veldt and make food for aasvôgel. This picture was never in Bob's mind as he listened to the drums and fifes. Down the street came the recruiting bands, drums and fifes. He followed them and they all but made him late for the show. He was ashamed to be walking on the pavement instead of behind them in the Queen's uniform. Oh, those fifes and drums—and drums and fifes. He had never heard such sweet music before.

The climax came when Mrs. Herbert Tree recited *The Absent-minded Beggar* at a Charity Matinée. Bob heard her and dashed out of His Majesty's Theatre at the refrain: 'Cook's son, Duke's son, Son of a Millionaire, Fifty thousand Horse and Foot going to Table Bay.' In a couple of strides he was over at the recruiting offices in Suffolk Street opposite, signing his name. It was done, he had joined.

Afterwards he blamed Mrs. Tree's stirring recital for sending him to the War in South Africa; but it was really Julie who had given him a release. She had moved up to town for the winter from Staines, and he had been able to sell the little dream place for a song and pay off his debts. This set him free to become one of Her Majesty's Yeomen and taste the irresponsibility of life as a trooper. No longer did the weight of a big show hang on his shoulders every evening.

He was back at school taking orders; and, at the moment of chronicling, he had finished his tea in his room at the Black Horse Hotel, Welshpool, and was deep in a terrible account of Spion Kop.

So immersed was he reading, he did not notice a knock on his door till a fellow-trooper had almost knocked it in. Then: "Have you seen this?" he cried, brandishing the paper as he admitted his friend. "Thousands of men massacred holding on to a plateau for nothing. Buller has again withdrawn his forces over the Tugela. *Again*, mark you. We'll never get to Ladysmith!"

"I know, my dear fellow, I know," soothed his friend. "But we can do nothing about it yet. Listen: you and I and another chap have been lucky enough to draw special leave for Liverpool. Are you staying behind, or shall I shine your boots?"

The friend was a bank clerk in civil life who had always longed to be an actor. As Bob was slow in finding an answer, the bank clerk[1] shined his boots for him and they caught the train for Liverpool. Here, Bob came to his senses and called on Murray Carson—the well-known provincial actor—who gladly gave the three soldiers a box for his play, *A Royal Divorce*. Then it was that the Liverpool audience proved that it, too, had been reading about Spion Kop: for as the troopers filed into their seats just after the curtain had gone up, the house rose at the sight of khaki and cheered till the play was stopped.

Bob was called on to make a speech. He was the central figure in the box. Shyly he murmured something about not having done anything yet. Then he was carried away by emotion and, bending over the edge of the box, he assured those upturned faces that as soon as the Montgomeryshires reached South Africa they would fight till their bodies levelled the valleys between the hill ranges, so that the British might reach Ladysmith. Reach it they surely must and would, to avenge their fallen comrades and turn the tide of defeat. And——

[1]Desmond Deane, who became an actor after the Boer War.

"Sit down, man, sit down," implored the trooper beside him, tugging at his tunic. "You're not a general to be giving guarantees. Control yourself."

But Bob had gauged the feeling of the house. They cheered and sobbed, and somewhere in the dimness a Welsh voice quavered: 'Oh, God, our Help in ages past,' and audience and stage sang the hymn through, and through again, before Murray Carson and his players could proceed with *A Royal Divorce*.

The incident was typical of the emotion sweeping the country. Bob responded to that emotion, was filled and uplifted by it, as if by a mighty force. Blake of the Jamesom Raid —the trooper who had tugged at his tunic—felt none of his exaltation. Perhaps it was because Blake had suffered badly at the hands of the Boers and bitterness was in his heart. There was no bitterness in Bob, but something akin to a sublime detachment. He saw himself striking down on the Boers as a heaven-sped instrument; there was no glory in this, nothing personal, not even the fear of death. For, if he happened to fall fighting, it would be in the execution of that for which he had lived. And what was death, once purpose was accomplished?

He was glad he had become a soldier: glad he belonged to the company of men who were walking in the light of a great purpose; for that meant he was living momentously —the only way he wished to live.

He had always wanted to be a soldier. When he was a child of three, talk of the Zulu War had floated across the table. He listened as he was being fed with bread-and-milk, and picked up something about Cetewayo's guard. When the visiting Governess came in an hour later, she found the little boy stalking up and down in front of the blackboard, marching with a heavy poker over his shoulder to the swish of his white-frilled starched petticoats. She asked him to stop. He didn't hear. She asked him again: he took no notice. She caught hold of him to end the marching and saw recognition struggle back into his eyes. With a tremendous effort at self-control he put down that poker. "I'm a guard!" he

gasped. "Plopper glown-ups never speak to plopper guards," and burst from the room shaking with sobs.

An ever-championing Aunt had met him outside. "Shall I read to you, Robbie?" she asked, drawing out her little pocket Bible.

"Only 'bout Heaven, Aunt Bella, only 'bout Heaven," wailed Robbie. Heaven was his pre-occupation.

They talked about it and the Holy Ghost at Church on Sundays, when he sat on a hard bench between his elders for between three and four hours. He never could understand the Holy Ghost, nor could any one explain this mysterious person. But Heaven was a delightful place, filled with fire, fighting and swords; the Lamb; weird monsters, streams and hills; angels and gates, and something happening all the time. You had to lose yourself before you could find Heaven, he was told, or that was what he understood. Probably he was told something quite different, for all around him in his Aunt's strict house, his cousins did tasks they disliked and submitted to distasteful rules, in the hope that they would one day be saved and go to that distant wonderful place—Heaven. A sweet but firm woman was widowed, lace-capped Aunt Bella: the family were deeply religious.

Theirs was not a course that recommended itself to Robbie, who was practical and emphatic over obtaining his desires. Why did they not be saved and find the place *now*? he asked. Yet he was singularly abstract-minded, too; for of all the answers he received to his inquiry, the one that most easily took root in his mind was that you had to lose consciousness of self to reach the place of enchantment.

This idea was only dimly perceived by him at the age of three, but later on it became so inextricably woven into his nature that his whole life was to be used as a jumping-off stage for Heaven, in a series of pursuits, all widely dissimilar, in which he hoped to be set free and lose consciousness of self in the disclosure of some great marvel. Even when he landed wide of the mark, as he often did, his attitude was always expectant and hopeful as though he stood perpetually on the threshold of miraculous adventure. Yet with all this, he

contrived to appear very ordinary, and do the most extraordinary things in the most ordinary way.

He was taken care of until he was four by Aunt Bella. His father was an actor, and as his parents were continually touring the provinces their travelling theatrical life was not considered healthy for the little boy. His first book was given to him at three-and-a-half—the Bible, a reward for learning the alphabet. Then a new problem entered his life. In the passages Aunt Bella read from the Revelation of St. John, he learned that only tribes specially marked on the forehead could enter Heaven. His Aunt was going; he saw she had the mark over the right eyebrow. A peculiar mark it was that would glow and fade, and he watched it do so for hours, reverently fascinated, till one day some one told him it was a birthmark. *That* was a bitter blow. It had been a sign for so long, however, that it remained with him a sentimental symbol.

And twenty years later, during the last days of his training as a soldier at Welshpool, when he saw the same mark over his own eyebrow, thrown back at him from a cracked mirror into which he was peering after a long day's march, the sight filled him with unreasoning delight. He knew full well that his mark had been caused by wearing an over-tight helmet, but, although he knew the cause, he took the sign as an omen. Was he about to find Heaven—NOW?

Certainly he seemed super-life-size to his Cousin Florence when she saw him embark for South Africa a week later. But, then, every trooper must have seemed super-life-size to his relatives when seen against the gaudily-decked troopship, which was strung with flags from funnel to mastheads, and again with paper streamers from mastheads to poles on the jetty. The men's khaki was the only note of business in a crazily gay send-off, accentuated by Alderman's scarlet, civic speeches and the din of five military bands pounding out popular tunes.

Wales and Liverpool had shared the cost of raising the Montgomeryshire Yeomanry. The city was bidding farewell to its own Regiment. So its warehouses were hung with

flags, its sheds covered in bunting, and every one on the dockside wore rosettes of the Montgomeryshires' colours. What a scene! As for the troopers themselves, you had only to listen to Robbie and his friends speaking, to know that as soon as the Yeomanry reached Table Mountain, the war would furl up; the regiment was sailing equipped with all the latest devices. Besides, a General called Roberts had recently appeared on the African veldt and, within the space of a fortnight, scored certain victories that had turned England's night into day. So it really seemed as if all that remained was for this Welsh contingent to sail, and success would be assured.

Very gallant, Cousin Florence thought young Robbie looked in his strange new khaki, standing without an overcoat in the bitter March wind between his great-coated Uncle Tom and Cousin Ernest, confidentially expounding the working of machine-guns. And patriarchal Uncle Tom—an imposing figure in the Churches of the North—and moustachioed Cousin Ernest, were listening to him, all ears.

Yet it was only that morning that Uncle Tom had changed the line in Family Prayers from: "Lord, we beseech Thee to guide our wayward and erring Cousin Robert . . ." to "Lord, we thank Thee for our Cousin Robert, give him, we beseech Thee, the craft of David, the horsemanship of Jehu. . . ." Uncle Tom did not approve of actors.

It was only Florence who was thrilled by Robbie's verve and success on the stage. But, then, Florence had travelled: she was the widow of an Egyptian archæologist. Now Robbie was smiling at Florence, that very characteristic smile of his, which started with a long twinkle in the eyes before the lips quivered and flashed into a beam. This smile was never directed to more than one person at a time; and very few people, indeed, ever received it. How any one could call him selfish, she did not know. He was generous, vital, creative: many-sided and interesting. And if he chose to do himself well, what of it? He could not be expected to conform to the rules of other people, when he was not like them.

Robbie took them over the ship. Uncle Tom, octogenarian,

insisted on seeing the men's quarters. These consisted mainly of a common eating and sleeping saloon, where night hammocks were slung up by day against the ceiling, and trestle-boards sprung up from the floor for food. It was festooned for this occasion with chains of bananas interwoven with apples, to show the men's families how well the Company intended feeding the troops.

Uncle Tom gave Robbie much good advice. Cousin Ernest gave him a pair of magnificent field-glasses. Florence pressed an envelope marked 'For Necessaries' into his hand as she said good-bye. It contained £5. She also gave him a camera and six rolls of films. Dear, understanding Florence. But they had all been good to him, and made him feel that he mattered, so that the 'Farewell' had seemed more like a reunion than a parting.

Even the actual moment of sailing had been supreme. Trooper Loraine had feared an anti-climax. But as the good ship *Montrose* drew out from the quay, her decks lined stiff with soldiers at the salute, the sun struck in shafts from a western cloud and enveloped her in light. Under the slanting beams she became somewhat unearthly . . . white decks charged with the peculiar gold of khaki . . . the very emblem of a ship of hope. All this Trooper Loraine, standing like a ramrod to 'God Save the Queen,' noted with a side-glance, and approved. He was a rare one for wishing a culmination to strike the right note, and this exit was to his liking.

The Anthem closed. With a sigh of relief he turned and faced the sunset. The departure had satisfied his emotions completely. Other troopers rushed to the deck rails to answer a last wave from white handkerchiefs on the quays, but he looked down the Mersey, towards Heaven.

His satisfaction lasted exactly half a minute. . . .

At the next, the air was rent by piercing noise and shock that shook the *Montrose* from prow to stern. Sirens! Every tug, ferry and liner in the Mersey started blasting on her steam whistles as the *Montrose* swung into midstream. The hooting was taken up by factories along the river-bank, ships behind the *Montrose*, and ships out of sight at the river

mouth. The noise was indescribable, deafening . . . not to be explained.

Every moment it was expected to stop, but it went on. Presently it resulted in an outbreak of hysteria among the more highly-strung troopers on board the *Montrose*. For, although the men were at first elated by this salute and stamped along the decks waving and shouting to the city that was wishing them God-speed, a Sergeant was overheard to say: "This caterwauling ain't never for us. They've 'ad news we've missed. Mafeking 'as been relieved."

Mafeking. This opinion passed round the ship. Troopers waited on tenterhooks to hear confirmation of the relief of Mafeking. A sergeant had said it. Sergeants knew. They were old-timers, never wrong.

Meanwhile ships in the widening river continued to dip their flags as the *Montrose* passed, and sirens kept up their demented shrieking. "O' course, it may be Peace," pronounced a Sergeant. As these words went round, fear fell like a pall over the troopers. Could it be that they had sailed too late? Had the War ended? Trooper looked at trooper in silence. In Africa there was that miracle worker 'Bobs.' He had probably rolled up the Boers in his pocket handkerchief.

Sun set. The men were called below, bedding was distributed, lockers allotted, kit unpacked. The noise had ceased, but a vague unease pervaded the saloon. Men were waiting to hear—what? They did not know. Suddenly the *Montrose* which had been going slow ever since the pilot had been dropped, stopped. Her anchor chain rattled down. "Blimey, it *is* Peace, after all," ejaculated a Sergeant. "We'll be disembarking at Liverpool to-morrer!"

Never in his life was Trooper Loraine to know such a panic as broke out at those words. The soldiers were first struck all of a heap, like ninepins. But it was only for a second. Then they barged around. In vain the Sergeants bawled: "Come back fra' the port'oles. Even if you're 'ome to-morrer, there's 'osses to water and kit ter stow ter-night. Come back!" No one listened; the men had lost their wits.

Some charged the saloon exits and were pushed back again, for the doors were shut at once—not, however, before Trooper Loraine—always the first to act—had slithered through and up the steps. Once on the decks above, he rushed blindly from side to side in the dark. Presently he recognised the lights of New Brighton.

The ship had anchored off New Brighton. There could be no doubt of it—there was the pier. There in that line of lights was a row of houses in one of which he had been born. The *Montrose* had stopped in front of his birthplace.

Good Lord! Had he become a soldier for that?

CHAPTER II

In after years whenever he lived through such brainstorms—and they shook him severely every now and then—his hair would go temporarily white. He was as yet too young for that, but he suffered just the same.

He needed this War. He needed the break.

It was not just the disappointment he would feel on landing back at Liverpool next morning, although that would be bad enough, it was the thought of *what was he going to do when he got back?*

He needed this War. He was sick of himself. He had to get away to something fresh.

To what? He did not know; and even as he tried to disentangle his thoughts, with his heart opening and closing as it were in his mouth, the lights of New Brighton, particularly those lighthouses he had known as a boy, kept flashing scenes from the past back into his head.

He was seven, sorting the Box-Office takings that his father had just emptied out of a leather wallet on to a plush-covered table. Ever so carefully he—Robbie—built the gold pieces into reedy towers of sovereigns and reedier ones of half-sovereigns: the silver into stout columns of crowns and half-crowns, between walls of pennies and shaky minarets of sixpences; and this fanciful money-building lay in a pool of light under a large oil-lamp. It was nearly midnight, but no other game was half so fascinating to the little boy with the saucer eyes and corkscrew-tufted curls. His father called it Addition without Tears, and Robbie could have told you to a penny how much he had in his building, for he was an accountant as well as an architect.

As usual, the first jerk sent some of the money flying over the empty centre space, cleared for rehearsal, into the surrounding jungle of sofas, tables and chairs. But no one bothered to hunt for the missing pieces, they were left to the

maid to pick up and put back on the table next morning. Such was the trust Henry Loraine reposed in the various landladies and their servants, some of whom he had known for over twenty years; and such was the success of the Henry Loraine Company in those days.

Even as he remembered, Robert could hear again the pop of the champagne bottle his father was opening to toast another week's top business. Harry always drank champagne.

"To the duck that lays the golden egg!" his father was calling. "To our play, *The Mystery of the Hansom Cab*, my dear," he said to Nellie Loraine, his wife and leading lady, "which releases us from the ardours of acting Lear, Macbeth and Don Cæsar de Bazan, and yet we shall never be poor again, poor again, poor again. No, we shall never be poor again, not on a Friday evening."

Singing, they would all sit down to a late theatre supper at a round table near the fire, and soon Nell had served something hot from a pan among the embers, and very little would be said till they had worked through to the cheese. Then Harry would move his chair away and tilt it back at an unbelievable angle, with his left foot slung on to his right knee and his thumbs dug deep into his high waistcoat pockets, and recount the events of the evening—the mistakes of the limelight man, the hacking cough from the third row, some poor devil with a swivel eye for whom he must find work in his company or else the man was likely to starve—until he would notice that Nell was busy feeding her son with tit-bits from her plate, and roar:

"Leave the boy to his milk-pudding. How often have you promised me not to do that, Nell. Potato will give our son dreams."

At this he would stretch over for Robbie's small beer-mug, the one the boy had drawn from a bran pie, and fill it with champagne. Then Nell would jump up and try and snatch the mug from Harry, her hair gleaming in vivid twisting curls, just like the boy's, directly it came under the lamp.

"Just a sup," Harry would cry triumphantly, circumventing her. "Beer from the Gods, my son, make you sleep like a top."

And when Robbie had tasted and spluttered, and this by-play had passed, they would settle down to the real business of the day: the discussion of plans and theatre economics, and – the *Programme*. The settling of the programme was vital. Other touring companies would go to a town, consult with the theatre manager, and then play whatever dramas formed the *surplus stock of his playbills*. This cut out the cost of printing, a very heavy item in those days. Harry was sufficiently successful to print his own playbills, especially with this *Mystery of a Hansom-Cab*, a trifling crime drama which drew larger houses than all the old favourites, whether Richelieu, Black-eyed Sue, or Belphegor.

Other companies had versions of the same play, but none of them came up to Harry's. Nothing could damage the strength of his drama, not even a memorable performance *without the hansom*, which vehicle was an integral part of the play.

On this occasion the stage manager had been unable to secure such a cab in the town, and at the critical moment the company had been forced to make urgent hansom noises off, while the audience, who had paid their money to see the villain hide and dash away in a cab *on-stage*, were fobbed off by a large plank behind the footlights, which said: ROAD CLOSED.

Behind this plank, the stage manager, dressed as a navvy, was busy wielding a pickaxe on stones, to show that the road was really up. And as he wielded the pick-axe for dear life in anticipation of the hisses that were to break over him, the audience barely murmured; such was their interest in the play, they passed over the ruse.

And whenever Harry re-told the tale, describing the Company's nerves and the sweating fright of the stage manager with his pick-axe, his chair would tilt back still more acutely, while his right hand passed excitedly through his shock of hair, and his laugh rolled up to the ceiling, as though from the bellows of a Cyclops. Such a laugh had Harry, such lungs; and such an unquestioning joy in living.

At fifty, Robbie recollected, he was little more than an

overgrown boy. It was only when indignation seized him that his great height and powerful fists became a menace. Robbie had seen disgruntled actors melt out of Green Rooms when Harry appeared with his pale-blue eyes blazing and his hair lifting like a lion's mane. But his laugh was more likely to fill Green Rooms, than his fists to clear them. He was such a loyal comrade, so candid; there was no guile in him.

He was rich enough at this period to have bought a theatre of his own in London. The proud possession of his own theatre earlier on might have effected a reconciliation between him and his father, the shipbuilder, who had disinherited Harry when he went on the stage, and forbidden him to use his surname Bilcliffe as an actor. So Harry had taken his mother's maiden name, Loraine.

"Not a penny of my money will you get, sir, not a penny," the old man had shouted, shooing Harry with his stick down the laurel drive of their home. And Harry, whose dignity and temper were not to be trifled with at the age of twenty-three, had merely turned and held his father's stick away while he replied: "I'd rather keep my soul."

What a gesture, thought Robbie, the little boy, when he heard of it. Lovely defiance, lovely words.

Now the shipbuilder was dead, and Harry had no one to please but himself and a wife who was twenty years younger than he. And Nellie Loraine placed so much faith in her husband's seniority that she never attempted to guide him, or else he might have become a great man, and they might never have fallen on stony days. But Harry was not a business man. He did not strike the best deal for himself in his palmy days, and he lived on every penny he earned. He had always lived on what he earned and shared out his fortune in the grand style of the theatre, and he had always been successful.

He had started out as a caravan-player when he left his father, all by himself, jogging down the twisting lanes into the villages, beating a drum on the greens and, as soon as folks came into the circle, giving them Shakespeare with himself in every role. And they had taken it from Harry, taken it and loved it and brought him their best cider for supper.

Even the sight of seven red-and-yellow coaches cavalcading into the Northern cities later, with his name H. Loraine splashed across them, did not compensate him for those lost days of early caravaning. Those coaches spelt the cares of management. And Harry was that rare creature, an artist who would have carolled for the joy of carolling, and been as happy reciting his parts to the birds, when he felt like it, as ever he was to crowded houses—a singer in Arcady.

It was odd that he should have survived at all in an increasingly commercial world.

"I give you our son, Nellie," Robert could hear him saying as he lifted his glass in the inevitable toast of the evening. "To Robbie's success, my dear, may he do the things I have dreamed of doing and can never do. May he go without fear, carry his head proudly, never disappoint his audience and take the name higher. Higher . . . that is if you want to be an actor, my son," he added crisply. "If you don't, then do as you wish; every man's life is his own."

And sixteen years later Robert—orphaned—heard those words on the troopship *Montrose* as clearly as if they had just been spoken. As clearly as if his father had stood beside him —fervent, trusting, childlike Harry Loraine, running a hand back through his lion-maned hair.

Did he want to be an actor, wondered No. 8175 of the Montgomeryshire Yeomanry? That was the question. His father's name had been, and still was, a household word in every town between Cardiff and Aberdeen, Glasgow and Norwich. Robert had made his own name quickly in London. But did his ambition lie in the theatre?

Back came the answer: '*Only when play and part could reveal and transport him into an entirely new state of consciousness.*'

He wrote that down some time later. The thought may not have been so clear to him that night on the *Montrose*, but it was most certainly present, for it was a fundamental part of his character. He was always seeking some *reality*, preferably in the form of a pursuit, that would quicken him into fresh consciousness effecting a re-birth.

"*To renew one's being continually under fresh aspects* is to

live," he also wrote, '*anything else is to stagnate.*' Anything else was, in fact, impossible to him. To renew his being by acting alone was never sufficient, although he was a born actor and revelled in dramatic situations. To the end of his days he never ceased acting; although he learned to disguise it with such fine art that people who met him privately called him the non-acting actor[1]. As a child his outbursts were more noticeable.

He was taken, when still in petticoats, to tea in a great house in Cheshire. Instead of feeding during tea he sat staring at his hostess, a grand old lady in mittens, backed by two peri-wigged footmen. He never spoke a word. After tea his hostess, wishing to make much of him, turned to her husband with: "Peter, my dear, hand me that picture book."

"Peter!" piped Robert. "Peter, you're as great a fool as your brother was before you." It was unfortunately true; although it happened to be only one of Harry Loraine's cues in a play the Company had been rehearsing. Robbie looked up with starry eyes, expecting to have his head patted, but he was quickly removed. He never visited the great house again, nor did his parents. His hostess would not believe that they had not passed derogatory remarks about Peter in front of the child.

When his nurse spoke about her mother who had been bereaved, as Mrs. *Rachel* Banks—Robbie never heeded the surname, he only heard the Rachel, and cried: "Rachel, Rachel, weeping for her children, is that your mother? Let us go to her at once." People in plays and books were as real to him as any he had met in the flesh. Not for many years could he tell the difference between them: another proof of the artist and actor. But far above all this was the dominating desire for new worlds and states of being—Heaven—an outlet.

He set out on his first quest for Heaven when he was four and had just graduated into breeches. Perhaps the real credit for the venture belongs to a little girl of six who lived down

[1]Bernard Shaw said of him: "He was one of those curious people whom you meet on the stage who was hereditarily an actor. The moment you put him on the stage he began to act instinctively and very brilliantly. But he was not personally an actor. His appearance did not bespeak the artist. He was all sorts of things except an actor."

the row. (It was the most modern sea-front row in New Brighton.) Her mother was an invalid, his mother was an actress: this gave the children much time for playing together on their own.

"My mother has seen you and likes you, all 'cept your hair," one day said the little girl.

"I know," said Robbie darkly. "It won't lie down. I'm like Samson, my strength is in my hair."

"Who's Samson?" asked the little girl.

Deeply shocked, Robbie took her away to a step and told her all about Samson and others in the Bible. Fancy not knowing Samson. Then, because she listened and he liked telling her, he gave her the key of his heart by letting her know a little about Heaven.

"Why don't you find the place?" she asked.

"Yes . . . yes . . ." said Robbie. This was a girl after his own heart. "But it's difficult. You have to be so good, you lose yourself."

"Lose yourself?" she echoed. "Then you must run away."

"Run away?" echoed Robbie in his turn. Was that it? Of course, Heaven was another place. She had solved the problem. Why had he never thought of that before? How simple. Oh, how simple—for a moment the world lay breathlessly still, lit by the wonder of it all; next moment he and the world were plunging recklessly ahead.

"Where are you going?" gasped the little girl as she ran after him down the sea-front.

"To find it," he replied. "Away from here." There was no time to lose.

"But where?" she asked. "I'm coming, too." His hand closed over hers.

"But where are you going?" she insisted. It was so like a woman, he thought, whenever he recalled the incident, and even as a boy he was struck by her absurdity. She knew they had to lose themselves, yet wanted to know where.

Now, Robbie, for all his eccentricities, was extremely logical. Others might think him strange, but they had to confess he was well-reasoned in his strangeness.

"There will be a sign," he muttered. There always *was* a sign, according to the Bible, for those about to find Heaven. He knew what he was doing, but could not find words to explain.

Sure enough, they had their sign. It brought them to a standstill in the middle of the High Street: a funeral. People lined the road on either side, and as the coffin passed a woman remarked: "A decenter man never breathed, he'll go straight to Heaven." That was enough. Robbie never quite knew how they slipped into that procession, but they followed the open hearse as close as they could get to it, down the town and on to the pier. Here a sailor, mistaking them for children belonging to the mourners, let them on to a ferry which was taking the coffin over to Liverpool.

On the ferry, a man tied some crepe on to the children's arms, saying: "Such a good man, such a very good man," while they nodded eagerly. The man in the coffin was going straight to Heaven, and they would see how he did it. Neither of them spoke much. It had turned cold and Robbie held the girl in his arms, even though she was taller than he. He had become strangely responsible. . . .

"I seed 'em followin' the funeral, I seed 'em," reiterated the baker to Robbie's mother, hours later, when a panicky hue and cry had gone up over the missing children. Nellie sent word to the theatre for the understudy to play for her, while she organised search-parties to comb the beach. Distracted Aunt Bella, who had only recently given up looking after Robbie, walked miles out to a new cemetery at Liscard, and climbed down into a newly-dug grave at 11 p.m.—in case he should have fallen in; she was not retrieved till morning. No one was certain of the destination of the funeral. Night watchmen in Cheshire and on the other side of the Mersey beat drums and blew horns, calling a reward for finding the children; and a Liverpool night watchman found them even as he was calling, tucked up on a doorstep, fast asleep in each other's arms. This was in a remote quarter of the town at three in the morning.

Oddly enough, neither of them was frightened or miser-

able, although they had long since lost their coffin in a torch-light procession which had met it at Liverpool. Other marvels had opened up, the marvels of a brightly-lit city, and it was a glowing Robbie who was handed back to his parents at eleven next morning. He had only come to tell them he was safe, he said. He wished to go straight on with his search. He was not hungry; he had not eaten, but he could not wait to stop for food, although the little girl was ravenous by now, and faint for lack of it. She did not mind giving up the venture, but he wanted to be right off on his search. He was highly indignant when his mother put him to bed.

An impasse arose. He could not sleep, and when he clamoured to be let out he became still more puzzled and outraged to find he was to be kept to his room. It was for his good, he was told. He pleaded, he tried to explain—they were snatching away his dearest hope—he fought, tears poured down his cheeks, and the more he tried to tell them, the more they misunderstood. They thought him a very precocious boy with his talk about Heaven; precocious he was, but not in the way they were thinking; he was not even allowed to see the little girl.

This inexplicable treatment, coming on top of his excitement, his newly-experienced exaltation, resulted in an attack of brain-fever from which he nearly died. He was delirious for many days—ill for two months.

Many little boys play truant, but few follow it up with brain-fever. The fact was, young Robbie could scarcely bear to be thwarted, still less to be deprived of an outlet. His mother had snatched away his dearest hope. When he recovered he had lost interest in that hope; besides, his parents were so pleased at his recovery, they gratified his every whim. He was taken away with them on tour and never let out of their sight. Nell had lost her first son, who had died as a baby; she did not wish to lose her second and only one.

A pathetically funny story about Robbie's convalescence was told in the family. Fever had left him weak and the doctor had ordered that on no account was he to be allowed to cry. So he was humoured fantastically. One day her

sisters came to call on Nell; there was a festivity in Liverpool and they passed in on their way. Aunt Bella came in from next door, the others arrived in their carriages. (Nell and her four sisters were known as the Muses, some were tall and some were middling, each was different and each was very good-looking.) The women rustled into a room so strewn with toys they could scarcely pick their way. Nell and Robbie were on the floor, both looking much of a size, for Nell was minute, and both so pale and worn, it was hard to tell which one of them was the more overwrought. But whereas Robbie's face was round and puffy, Nell's was oval.

Grannie was there. Nell had asked her mother to stay with her, for her mother was one of a family of thirteen and had herself raised nine children. Robbie was playing with Grannie's spectacles.

"Mamma," he announced. "I want a donkey." The maid was dispatched to a shop round the corner. "Not that kind of a donkey," he said when she returned—"a *live* donkey."

Aunt Bella pointed out how inconvenient a live donkey would be in that room. "Then an engine," said Robbie. One was brought. "*Smoke* in my engine," he commanded. Swiftly Nell twisted some paper into the funnel. "Not that kind of smoke," he screamed. "*Plopper* smoke." Hastily some one interposed a toy piano. This was bashed in; there was no music in it, he said.

"Robbie wants flowers," he cried. Tremulously, a wax circlet of flowers under a glass disc was handed him off the mantelpiece. "No. *No*, Robbie can't pick these," he said mournfully. "Not these. . . . Robbie wants somepekin, Mamma," he went on, puzzled. He had grown very childish in speech after the illness. "*Somepekin* else . . . oh, what is it that Robbie wants?" Perplexity was too much for him, he buried his head in her lap and burst into violent tears. They, who had taken everything from him by stopping his search, were now willing to give him anything: but their substitutes were no use to him; he was after reality.

The sisters tiptoed from the room. What was not to happen had happened. Robbie's sobs were sounding through

the house, he was so self-willed. But who could expect otherwise, they whispered among themselves. Nell had been self-willed and married an actor—a God-fearing man, but an actor; Harry had been headstrong and thrown over his father's business; this was their headstrong son.

Once again, Robert was experiencing something of that same frustration now, over this Boer War.

He had to get away from himself and have a change. And that change had to be something real, something far removed from make-believe. But where was he to turn and find an outlet, something new ?

As a boy, after his first truancy, he had satisfied his desire for escape in books. He had read voraciously, anything he could get hold of. Penny dreadfuls, Dickens, Milton, Shakespeare. He had also attended rehearsals when he was on tour with his parents; spent hours with ' props,' devising fakes for the stage, or with his father when the latter was scene-lighting. There were no child-parts in Harry Loraine's repertory, so he did not act; but occasionally he held the book in the prompt corner, when ' prompt ' was needed to play an extra on stage.

On these occasions Robbie was known as the ' book ' himself, for he always had the play off by heart. His memory was like a gramophone record: he had only to hear the play once to stammer through it, then reel it off second go; blank verse was even easier to remember than prose. He had an incredible facility also for recalling stage business. If a play was revived after some time, it was always Robbie who reminded his father of the moves that had brought actors on, or taken them off stage.

But for the most part he was to be found in his parents' lodgings, stretched out on a couch, reading. He read and read till he grew short-sighted. The doctor came, pronounced him pasty, prescribed Gregory powder. Robbie took Gregory powder once. When it came to the next time, he climbed out of a fourth-storey window. Hanging down from the ledge, which he gripped with both hands, he proceeded to dictate terms to his parents ' for continuing to live.'

His father at once stepped forward to pull him up. "Come

closer, and I'll let go and drop!" shouted Robbie. His father stopped. He knew the boy, and knew he would carry out his word. The doting parents had to agree to anything Robbie said. He was to have no more Gregory powder, no more 'exercise,' no more anything except what he wished.

In this way matters proceeded serenely for several years, under the dictatorship of Robert Pasha. He read and read so continuously that his meals were brought to his couch, and *their taste had to synchronise with the emotions aroused by his books.* Much as he liked his luncheon, he would pass by the roast, the stew or the grill, if it did not blend with his situation! (The situation in the book was always his situation.) Presently he went through such an emotional crisis with *The Tale of Two Cities* that he determined to commit suicide. Life was not worth living if men could behave as they had done to Sydney Carton. Let his death be a protest. So he swallowed the whole of a bottle of hair lotion on his mother's dressing-table—labelled 'poisonous' because it contained a strong narcotic—and lay down on the bed to die, aged eleven.

Fortunately his heart was strong enough to survive the narcotic and he regained consciousness after a forty-eight hours' sleep, feeling grand, but very much astonished to discover his mother and the doctor watching by his bedside. He then learned he was to be sent to boarding-school; his parents could cope with him no longer.

Alas! Funds were low at the time, although Robbie did not know this. Harry Loraine had been speculating outside the theatre, and for four years he had had no new play with which to gild his repertory. Still, Nellie managed to put aside half the weekly takings for the next six weeks and bank them in reserve for her son's schooling. So it was that the boy went back to New Brighton to enter the best private school in Cheshire.

Naturally, Robbie welcomed the change. He felt important; was eager to learn; expected school to provide endless excitement, including some snatch-and-grab raids into knowledge. Instead, it provided endless copying out of textbooks; arithmetic that had no relation to life; cheating;

greasy potatoes and stale bread, as well as boys he was compelled to fight and then was punished for fighting.

Immediately he wished to leave, and informed his mother so. But she turned a deaf ear to his pleadings and reminded him that it was he this time who had promised to remain and become her clever son. The doctor had warned her so strongly about Robbie's neurosis, she was determined he should be brought up with boys. Meanwhile the luckless Robert would have approached one of his Aunts, but that a sudden and untimely exodus of Aunts to Australia and Canada had coincided with his return to New Brighton. A dispersing wave seemed to have hit the family, for his own parents gave up touring and went to London where Nellie, who had fallen ill, was placed under the care of a specialist. Robbie did not even join them for the holidays, as it was thought wiser that he should spend these at school, by the sea. Thus, from being the centre of the family, he suddenly found himself left high and dry, alone, for an unendurable two years.

At school he became aware of a new horror: a consciousness of the passing of time. He seemed to have been born twinly-conscious of marvellous things to do and the fatal ticking of the clock: of goals to be attained and disastrous interception. From these days on he never could bear to waste time. Grimly he fretted yet stuck it, because of his promise to his mother. Then one day his resentment boiled over at something the master had said, and he left—running away characteristically.

The break was irrevocable. First he had torn his exercise book in half, then he had snapped the master's cane in two, standing right next to the man in front of the entire class. His rage had been cyclonic, terrifying, yet controlled. It had held the class hypnotised. He dominated them. He strode to the door and opened it, slammed it and locked it from the outside, scornfully tossed the key into the hall fire, and then streaked downstairs for his coat and boots.

Luckily he met no one; he would have killed any one who had tried to stop him.

And all because the master had told him to do his Geometry again, without glancing first at what he had done. "You

cannot have written the Theorem right in the time," said the master when Robbie had brought up his book. "Go back and do it again." And Robbie knew he had written the Theorem right, and the old fool would not even look at what he had done. It was monstrous, lazy, stupid, typically unjust. He was wasting his life, he could stand it no longer.

Two days later saw him loading liners at Liverpool. Heaven, he had now decided, lay somewhere in the Yukon, gold-prospecting. He intended getting there, as a stowaway; to that end he was loading. Unluckily no liner was sailing for ten days. So far he had found it easy to procure shelter, for people were amazingly kind to a nicely-spoken, well-dressed boy who had lost his money—he hadn't a penny—but now his overcoat had been stolen. He had left it in a wood-yard while loading, and when he went back it had gone. The month was February, the weather was raw; he was hungry. In a despondent moment he almost wished he had left the School badge on his cap instead of tearing it off, then the Police would have found him and taken him back again. So he thought. But in actual fact the head of the School had never notified the police he had run away, because his term's fees had not been paid.

Away in London, Nellie Loraine was desperately ill, and Harry could not get work, chiefly because he would not leave Nell. Nor had he sufficient money to take a company out on the road; besides, marvellously equipped companies were now being sent out, companies in which he might have been engaged as a star; but Nell could not travel, so Harry stayed at home. Of all this Robbie knew nothing. He only knew his mother had not written for a long time, and that when last she wrote the letter seemed to tell him nothing. He was hurt; he thought his parents no longer loved him; something strange had driven them apart.

He could, of course, have gone to an Uncle in Liverpool. But he knew that that Uncle would certainly pack him back to school. And at the definite prospect of returning to school, Robbie quietly decided it was better to die, if needs be, trying to make his living.

He had a meal on what he had earned as a dock-hand. He needed it—else his nose and stomach would have turned at the smell of the cook-shop he entered. It was one of a long chain of cellars in the quayside, where the lasting stench of bilge, sickly-sweet rum, kerosene lamps, baccy, beer and rotting vegetables was cut by cod, herrings, tar, oilskins and the body odours of unwashed humanity from every part of the globe. The ceiling was obscured by smoke, the floor by mud. Such places have long since been destroyed; *then* they were known as Sailors' Dives.

Dramatic entertainment of a kind was offered in one of the inter-communicating cellars, which was fitted up as a theatre. If the play was good, the players were treated to drinks; if bad, to any handy and suitable missile. One bo'sun in particular hit hard. The Manager required a boy to take the parts of *old men and heavies* as villains were called in those days. Robert, by now quite definitely an old man of thirteen, applied for the job.

He sang, boxed, stood on his head, and recited Shakespeare. Something of the business acumen of his shipbuilding grandfather must have come to the fore, for he refused to accept the engagement under sixteen shillings a week. This was six shillings more than the previous boy had been getting. But, then, argued Robert, ' Look at what he could do, and all he already knew.' Could he write plays? asked the Manager. Robert fired off every winning gag in his father's repertory, and promptly informed the Manager that his salary would go to twenty-five shillings if he were required to act and *write more than one play a week.* He was engaged.

Meanwhile he had nowhere to sleep. No money was advanced on account of salary, so that he might take rooms; he was obliged to curl up on the musty rat-infested floor of the stage, a mere platform raised on beer-casks.

The hardships of that first week drove all recollections of it from his mind. He knew he must have played in two fresh plays a day, because that was the rule. There were fourteen new plays a week, unless one of them made such a hit, that it could be repeated. They were all highly-coloured dramas,

to be viewed for 1*d.* and 2*d.* a head; admittedly knocked out of old melodramas, out of topical sensational crime and penny dreadfuls; or even out of the classics, for the situations in the classics were always sound. After every murder on stage, there was a variation of the Lady Macbeth sleep-walking scene, and the plays only ended as a rule when every one of the cast was dead.

In these venturesome shows Robert took as many as four different parts, and from the moment the curtain went up, he was on the run. Change, change, change. The lessons it taught him in make-up lasted his life. It also taught him to know good from bad theatre, and tricks that never failed. It was rough stuff, maybe, but right on the nail.

Mornings were spent in scene-shifting and such rehearsals as were necessary to the most impromptu plays. There was a final rehearsal between the afternoon and evening show. Every actor played for the success of his own part and the round of applause that meant drinks after curtain-fall; he neither showed consideration for other players nor expected it. Robert soon learnt to stand up and prove *during performances* that he would not be kicked around.

Harry Loraine would have been furious had he known where his son was playing; and Robert himself felt ashamed —for this was not the theatre as he knew it—but he could not help being secretly thrilled. It was fun fixing in his own lines, either stolen from some other play to fit the occasion, or self-coined. Years later he wrote: "I have no recollection of suffering agonies of shyness on my first appearances, nor of finding the learning of fourteen new parts a week an unduly laborious task. The mind of a youth is infinitely retentive, and it is a fact that a little later on I acquired nearly the whole of Shakespeare by heart with less labour than I now find necessary to master one new part."

It was also sheer joy to hear the sailors clack their beer-mugs for him, in applause. He would go without second dinner helpings to buy a stick of superfine chalk, or blacker charcoal; the possibilities of make-up were so exciting. There was a sweet side to the roughness of this life, and perhaps it

was not surprising that every instinct in him strained after success.

He had meant the engagement to tide him over until he sailed as a stowaway. Instead, he found he was tied to the Dive by lack of funds. He dared not risk losing his job by going out to load ships. Moreover, the cold he had experienced at night sleeping on stage, convinced him he would freeze crossing the Atlantic in February without an overcoat.

His salary went in food and face-paints. It was not until six weeks later he won a pair of sea-boots in an all-in wrestling contest, which sometimes took the place of plays; so at last he was able to fare forth on a Sunday, and take rooms four miles out of Liverpool. Till then his own boots had been in holes.

Now he would at least be sleeping above ground.

And now mornings saw him set out at seven, tramping into Liverpool, learning his parts on the way (these were always given out after the final show in the evening), while nights saw him slipping in at 1 or 2 a.m. He had his midday meal at the Dive, off yams, pork, beans, biltong, cod or salt-beef; anything the eating-house cook could find him. Dock-yard meals were always spiced and varied, drawn from the jettisoned cargoes and stores of ships. In the mornings he set out on tea and toast. This was scarcely a warming diet against wind, sleet and snow, but it served. He even shot up right out of his clothes—probably because he stayed in bed on Sundays and had boiled eggs and a cut off the family joint.

Sunshine in late May called him out an hour earlier one morning. He set off at 6 a.m. for Liverpool and took a light-hearted stroll through the town. Thus he discovered that a touring company was playing at the city's chief theatre, *and this company only changed their bills—or their play—once a fort-night.* Crikey! He could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw this. What luxury! Only one new play a fortnight. Why, he had played in 140 odd plays and 370 parts since February. Whatever did they do with their time? It became imperative for him to see the Manager of this company—Robert straight-way felt that eighteen hours' hard work a day was proving a

strain—and he gave up several midday meals in order to waylay the august personage and even squeeze from him a promise that he would come and see him act that night.

"To this day I don't know what made me be so foolish as to say I would!" related this Manager seven, ten and twenty years later, when Robert Loraine's name had made the story worth repeating. "But where would Loraine have been if I hadn't gone, eh? No, I did not *sense* talent. I was stopped in the street by a boy with no end of push and a head like a Viking's—fine head, blue eyes, wiry upstanding curls—and sleeves that ended at the elbow. 'Your Company has no actor to touch me,' says he. 'I've played in 200 plays and 500 parts since Christmas, and there's nothing I can't play. You'll be missing the opportunity of a lifetime if you don't see me.' He made me laugh so, he was so sure of himself and earnest, that I had to say I'd go, because he was such a boy *and had such hope, you see.* Of course, I knew very well nothing but rough stuff ever came out of a Sailors' Dive. And he was rough, I can tell you, even I wasn't prepared for that kind of rough stuff. He——"

But whatever may have followed in the performance, Robert was by no means rough in preparing his part. It was his first First-night of importance. The drama was entitled *The Sea-King's Vow*, and luck favoured him for he had only one character to play and could devote his time to it. He was to be an Ancient Monarch of 73 who came to beseech the Ravaging Dane—or Sea-King—to respect his daughters' chastity. It was a short but effective part. The daughters in question were the eating-house cook—aged 43, the Manager's wife—a mere 48, and the Manager's daughter—26. Father Robert was thirteen, but that had nothing to do with the play.

He pointed up his speech till it was as telling as he could make it. "Look at them, regard them well, oh Chieftain," he had to say. "They are the sad pledges left me by their sainted mother. It has ever been my care to watch over them and protect them, to make them worthy to become honest men's wives and good men's mothers. Can you throw to the winds all this? All their entreaties and a father's prayers. A father's

prayers. Ah! take my kingdom, take my crown; coin my heart for gold, but spare my daughter's honour."

Robert knew how he meant to present the part. Bang went 2/- on a wig and a three foot flowing white beard. Another 2/- hired anchor chains, heavy manacles and gyves, and a further florin procured four lubberly dock-hands to act as gaolers. These men were to haul him on before the ravaging Dane or Sea-King, and throw him down most brutally, so that the weight of his chains against his frail appearance would strike pity into the hearts of the sailors and he could then build the scene to an appealing climax. He knew his best chance of impressing the Manager depended on how well he impressed the audience.

So he took endless pains rehearsing his gaolers and perfecting his make-up; and when he came on, the touring Manager, at the back of the audience, nodded. This lad was worth while. Had the Manager not been specially told, he would never have recognised the boy who had waylaid him in this palsied old man, with the sorrowful eyes. But even as the old man was hurled to the ground, before he had uttered a word, the Sea-king had shouted the exit cue, the last line of the scene. "I know what he would say," declared this ravaging Dane. "Throw the old dotard out, take him away."

Robert was severely shaken. The Sea-king, who was the leading man, evidently knew he had some one out in front, and was determined to cut the scene. The bewildered gaolers stepped forward to hoist the Ancient Monarch up and off, obeying violent gestures from the Dane. But was Robert to be suppressed so easily? No! With a tremendous effort he lifted his chains—displaying a strength far beyond his appearance—and let them drop heavily on the feet of the gaolers who retreated howling, while he cried:

"No, you do not know what I would say. Behold my daughters"—three women cowering against the back-wall, out of reach of trouble. "Regard them well, they are the sacred pledges left me by their sainted mother——"

"Out, out, I say," interrupted the Dane. "Into the lowest dungeon under the castle moat," and stepped forward

threateningly. The gaolers advanced again, while Robert wailed:

"Nay, nay, I will not be ta'en away. Gaolers, I will not be ta'en away. Hearken! It has ever been my care to protect them, and make them worthy to become honest men's wives and good men's mothers——"

The leading man's face registered paroxysms of fury. "Remove him," he yelled. "Will you not obey?"

The gaolers threw themselves on Robert, who struggled against them: "Will you throw to the winds all this, their entreaties and my prayers? A father's prayers?" gasped the old man.

"His life shall answer for this, for this—*audacity*," shrieked the Dane.

"Ay, *take* my life," the Ancient Monarch topped him. "My crown, my kingdom, but spare, oh spare, my daughters' chastity."

Robert was being dragged off backwards, but the scene had swept triumphantly to its close. There was wild applause. Every interruption from the leading man had built up the drama more powerfully.

The enraged Dane leapt forward to kick the Ancient Monarch; then a staggering thing happened, for with one lurch of his chain, the old, old man knocked the stalwart Sea-king out, and the curtains crashed to in an uproar.

Robert went back to his dressing-stool blinded with tears. His days in the Sailor's Dive were surely ended, and he had belied his part. Whoever saw an old man strike out like that. The Manager would think he could not act, after all the trouble he had taken. What a fiasco! And he had spent his rent.

Strange to relate, the touring Manager came round. "Can you play a young part?" he asked. Tearing off his wig and beard, the boy burst into Henry V's. speech before Agincourt: it was all he could remember and his favourite. "That'll do," said the Manager. "Twenty-five shillings a week."

"Thirty," said Robert, calmly, and got it.

"Very well," said the Manager. "But, understand, each

time you injure a member of the cast, you'll forfeit two week's salary, and three week's salary if you knock 'em out."

"All right," roared Robert, and they shook hands on it.

That night the boy walked home on stars. He had left the Sailor's Dive, and left it victoriously. Consequently his feet scarcely seemed to touch the earth, an impression helped no doubt by the fact that he'd had no food for twenty-four hours. He did not wish to eat. Nothing so prosaic. Back in his room, he lay abed floating and bumping around—Heaven—for hours. Exaltation was on him again, probably the reason why he did not break down.

. . . . . .

Five years later, he was recapitulating his triumphs to his parents, telling them of all the 'wonders' he had been and planned to become. From receiving 30/- a week with the repertory touring company, he had risen to £3 when he played the lead in *The Armada*; stayed with them two years and then gone to Ben Greet's Woodland Players at £3 10 0—a master producer in his time was Philip Ben Greet—stayed two years with Ben Greet and toured all over England with others, at salaries sometimes soaring to £10.

"And if you had seen me when the pistol refused to go off and I was supposed to shoot myself dead," he told his mother, " and the pistol would only go tick, tick, tick, and the audience were waiting . . . one lives through years when situations misfire," he informed his father, who nodded. "So I fell flat on my face on the stage, pretending to throw a fit, at the end of which I exclaimed: "My God, I have broken my neck!"

"And d'you know, they took it. There wasn't a laugh, no one appeared to think it strange I could speak after I had broken my neck. They believed me absolutely. Can you beat it?"

And as Robbie slapped his thighs, Harry broke into his old laugh, his rocking-chair tilted far back, his thumbs stuck deep into his high waistcoat pockets, Ha-ha-ha—till his mirth almost lifted the ceiling.

Such a jolly re-union it was. Nell did not laugh, her eyes twinkled but she pressed a handkerchief tightly into her mouth.

D'Artagnan in *The Three Musketeers*, 1899.

"The neighbours," she murmured, hushing them; but Robbie learned later she only did that because she was racked with pain if she laughed.

"Of course, I'm only getting £6 a week for this my first appearance in London. But then, it is London and I'm not yet eighteen, and they don't know what I can do," he confided in his mother.

She smiled. How sweetly Nell could still smile, in spite of looking so thin under her tightly-drawn shawl on the couch. She had been the toast for prettiness in Liverpool when he had left them for school—days so remote they seemed to belong to another life—no one would recognise her as that now, alas! She had shrunk and lost all her glow. His father, too, had aged. It was a shock to Robbie, who had not seen them for seven years. Ever since he had started acting, he had worked so hard there had been no time for visits, only for brief week-end holidays cycling over the moors, or splashing into the sea at Blackpool or Scarborough. And they had never come to see him! Queer that, when he was their son, he had sometimes thought, especially when they had once been inseparable. Either side had corresponded lovingly, but tersely, ever since he had taken the lead in *The Armada*, and his position had been so well-established there could be no treating him as a run-away schoolboy and hauling him home.

He knew his father was no longer taking out companies. But it was odd to find them in dingy lodgings, and without play-bills. Harry assured him that these lodgings were purely temporary, but he seemed to turn away uneasily and Robbie had an uncomfortable feeling that his people were in difficulties. A feeling fully confirmed when Nell fell gravely ill, for the last time, two days after his first-night in town and was put into Hospital.

Robbie was able to provide her with two weeks comfort before she died. Then he learned that she and Harry had been on starvation-edge for years. "Why had he never been told?" he asked, and even as he asked the answer seared into his mind, *Why had he never come to see?*

Why? Why?

He had never imagined his people as being hard-up. He had known, vaguely, that Nell had been ill, but never suspected she had been ill continually. Even on the first evening when he had sought them out, and suggested they should come out with him to dine and celebrate, she had replied she was too easily tired, but immediately counter-suggested that he should go off and bring in some champagne. Her mind had flown back to the old days, when champagne was the prosperity-sign. She did not drink the wine that evening: it was for him and his father. It was not until later Robbie heard that the milk she could have drunk was not in the house. And always after that he hated the taste of champagne. But Nell had kept up the old ever-prosperous theatre bluff with him.

Bitterly he reproached himself for not having inquired with more care; for not having sent them funds all these years. He—who had thought himself such a man, striking out on his own, and mastering difficulties, making good salaries—had left Nell to fight the harder odds of illness, poverty and pain.

Not that events need ever have taken such a turn, had Harry not speculated and Nell refused treatment at the start. But treatment would have meant breaking into the money she had set aside for her son's schooling; and Nell, whose seeming frailty was her chief charm, would not do that. Harry had not insisted that she should, because he was an optimist and did not believe she would continue to be ill. Had he even anticipated lean years ahead, he would have compromised with all his views and taken any form of engagement; but he had waited, confidently expecting good times to appear again. They had never come; and Nell had continued to be ill.

Closer and closer he and she had shut themselves in, hugged themselves like hermits whose lives had passed into a 'has-been.' There was no one to whom Harry could apply for help. He dreaded the family's comment: Why had he not saved against a rainy day. Only Aunt Bella sent them what she could from Australia. . . . No wonder they had never called their son home. Nor had they known he was doing so well, till he came.

It was all so strange and needlessly heartbreaking.

Robert, suddenly bereaved at eighteen, so old and so young, asked himself: "Could I have prevented this?" And his mind answered: Yes, yes, yes! Fortunately for him he was called away to the provinces to play a part that taxed all his resources and put an end to brooding. When he came back to London he had his father to stay with him and, from being the star on tour in *The City of Pleasure*, took a minute part in *The Prisoner of Zenda*, so as to be with the old man who had a part in that play, too.

Every night the Loraines, *père et fils*, could be seen arriving at, and leaving the St. James's Theatre together. Bobbie, young, bright-eyed and strong, Harry curved like an aspen leaf with long white locks sweeping his shoulder. You had but to follow them up St. James's Street to see Robbie—obviously impatient but very controlled and gentle—go through a pantomime of shaking hands with some one on the pavement, and then take firmly hold of Harry's arm and urge him on. The old man was always pausing to introduce him to imaginary friends who kept stopping them on their way home—this was Robbie, his son. Harry's mind, in private life, had gone back to the past. In Robert's lodgings, he spoke continually to Nell, out loud: and frequently did not recognise his son.

So, it was not surprising that Robert—heartsick, and for the first time bewildered and lonely—should fall under the spell of Julie Opp. Beauty apart, she was so wise and well-poised. She had sophistication, which he lacked, and would always lack, for to the end he was easily fired and remained an enthusiast.

Her words about his mother when he told her what lay so heavily on his mind—all on that memorable Sunday on the river—were balm. "Do you suppose your mother noticed the things you did not do for her? Her joy was in your achievements and in you," Julie had said.

What blessed words; more blessed still because Robert knew they expressed Nell's point of view. Julie had understanding. He graced her with all the virtues and, still suffering from the shock of his mother's death and all he had left undone for her, longed to dedicate his life to some woman—to Julie.

Julie had also advised him about his father. She said that if Bob meant to succeed, he must circulate among actors and stage-folk, instead of looking after an old man. "Remember he lives in his own life," she had said. "You have yours. His joy will be in your achievements rather than in your company, which he frequently does not notice."

After that, Bob had kept his father in separate rooms, comfortably, but away from him. And Bob had soared as Julie said he would. Two great Drury Lane successes had followed each other, with him as 'Dick Beach' in *The White Heather*, and the 'Indian Prince' in *The Great Ruby*. And all his success as 'Dick Beach' was due to his having added and written his own death scene, a little trick he had acquired at a Sailor's Dive in Liverpool. And Harry's joy was certainly in his son, for he sent his cronies to sleep talking of the boy, till he too passed away. Passed away while Bob was absorbed preparing the house for Julie. Then, Julie had come home. . . .[1]

Now, all his doubts about himself had returned. Disillusionment over her, had caused double disillusionment over himself. He wanted to be—fine. He wanted to justify the existence of the man—Loraine. And he could only do that by working for some cause that did not end in self. He must lose all thought of self if he wanted to reach Heaven, he remembered.

All his early religious upbringing surged back on him in a form of mental self-flagellation which, had he but known it, was not uncommon to his state of development and youth. He was falling short of aspirations, yet he could not bear to lose his ideals, nor his belief in himself as something potentially fine.

The Boer War had been his chance, promising new life, adventure, glory, self-sacrifice. If there was to be no war for him now, where would he get his break?

And as he paced the decks of the troopship *Montrose*, his mind darting from the past into the future, along known and unknown tracks of thought he saw he would have to try and build his life more consecutively in the future, instead of plunging wildly ahead on impulse. He saw this with crystal-

[1]Several years later, when their marriage had been dissolved, Julie Opp married William Faversham and co-starred with him for years successfully in New York.

clarity. Then, smashing all cold self-analysis rose the desire to do something fresh. He had to taste something new . . . to find an outlet, an outlet—Heaven.

This was to be the dominating urge of his life. He could no more resist it, than he could resist blinking now, in the strong flash from a lighthouse. Jove, what a beam! He wondered he hadn't noticed that before!

It brought him sharply back to his surroundings on the deck of the *Montrose*. His eyes were smarting from the night wind and sea-drift. He rubbed them and found there was no illusion. They were signalling from the lighthouse, and to the ship, as the *Montrose* was flashing back from a great lamp on the bridge deck. His Morse was very imperfect, but he deciphered something that was verified a moment later when an officer on the bridge whistled down a speaking-tube and sang out: "Chief, stoke engines for starting away at 3 a.m. on the outgoing tide. First stop Las Palmas, no stop at Gib for coal. Can you last out? What? Right, fire away full steam."

So they were sailing. Sailing. Going on. Long shivers broke down him. He could have thrown himself flat on the deck, or leapt overboard for joy. Like one reprieved from death, he lived again. Ever-receding horizons opened up, vistas of infinity. He was thankful beyond words.

3 a.m. found him standing on the table in the Chief Engineer's cabin, giving them the Ride Recital from *d'Artagnan*. His eyes were blazing, his feet were wedged between a magnificent ham and a magnificent stilton, around these were also smoked salmon, port and flasks of Van de Hum. The feast had been spread in his honour solely because he was an actor; because the Chief Engineer had seen him at Drury Lane and admired his father at Stoke-on-Trent long years before him. For this reason also he was to dine with the Chief every evening of the trip.

So, here was Loraine, the soldier, receiving favours due to Loraine the actor; and the theatre to which he had so dreaded returning a few hours back, had rarely seemed more alluring, as now that he was sailing—a *star*-trooper to the War in South Africa.

CHAPTER III

AND AFTER all that, what was the Boer War?

He never once went through a show-down fight with the Boer. By the time the Montgomeryshires reached South Africa, the semi-defeated Boer Army under Botha was fighting a rear-guard action, while half a dozen independent commandos were harrying the British lines of communication.

It was these independent commandos who led the British a dance over half South Africa; popping up in country that had been subjugated; vanishing like Jack-in-the-boxes and popping up elsewhere; playing hide-and-seek to perfection around their own birthplaces: infuriating the perspiring Britishers and in particular disheartening the Yeomen, who never could catch up with the Boer.

There were no satisfactory pitched and decisive battles, only a series of fugitive running engagements. Trooper Loraine never realised his dream of charging a Boer battery single-handed, and, after ferocious fighting, raising the Union Jack high above them in the smoke and dust and roar. Nothing like that. It was not that the Boers had ceased using heavy guns. They had many which they moved with surprising agility. But no battery of theirs, in all the scorching, glinting veldt, seemed to stay long enough at one given spot—to charge.

All the same, he had a hand in silencing two Boer batteries, for which he was mentioned in dispatches. He thought nothing of this, because he did not risk his life in doing so, and gratified no impulse towards heroics. It was at Sand River, where he had his first taste of shell-fire, and where the younger de Wet was throwing up a demonstration to screen his brother, the great and wily Christian de Wet, who was busy tearing up railway lines seven miles behind him at Kronstadt junction, to prevent supplies from reaching Roberts.

At that time Lord Roberts and the main column of the British Forces were two hundred miles farther on, pushing a

retiring Botha in and out of the Boer capital of Pretoria; but, as usual, they were being attacked in the rear by the indefatigable Olivier, de Wet and Prinsloo. Among these, Christian de Wet was genius.

At Sand River, his brother had a couple of howitzers, well concealed, painted black and primed with smokeless powder, so that no flash on firing betrayed their situation. "*Owing to his gift of accurate hearing*," says the dispatch, "*Trooper Loraine, who had been out on Cossack post and patrol could tell whence the firing was proceeding. He passed the information back to our guns so precisely, that the Boer pieces were rapidly silenced.*" Meanwhile, in that same action, Trooper Loraine rode out towards Kronstadt to reconnoitre, and found that Christian de Wet, frustrated by his brother's failure to 'hold-up,' had merely dislodged two railway-lines. No. 8175 might have been decorated for this service, as also on another occasion when he was mentioned in dispatches for posting across country between Colonels Baden-Powell and Plumer, but that on each occasion he was serving on detachment away from his regiment.

As for the time he rode between Baden-Powell and Plumer, all night long across a shadowless plain under the moon; he arrived at G.H.Q., at dawn with two bullet holes through his helmet, and a bullet and three sizzle tracks in the coat strapped on the saddle behind him. He was congratulated, and he congratulated himself as it had been a ride against death and he had come through. Not a Boer had he seen, of course, and there had been no rocks to shelter a sniper, but his horse's hooves had announced his coming by beating a tattoo for miles before he was visible as a flying target.

For unjamming a machine-gun in action with his own Regiment, and so repulsing an enemy attack, he was raised to the rank of a corporal. This he forfeited on the way home, on a hospital ship, when he fought the Sergeant-Major.

Now, Trooper Loraine admired the Sergeants in the Montgomeryshire, they were the only men who knew their job; they had nursed the Troopers throughout the campaign. But the Sergeant-Major he could not abide. And this incident served in retrospect to colour all his recollections of the South

African War, as a continual frustration in which there had been bitterer man-to-man fighting in the Regiment than ever against the Boer.

Firstly, on landing and proceeding to Camp outside Cape-Town, 8175 had disagreed with the officer in command of the Gun Section. This officer knew nothing whatever about machine guns which were a hobby with Trooper Loraine. (Years later, in the Great War, he held that whichever side could find a device to stop the jamming of machine-guns, would win. And he spent quite a time trying to find such a device.) But at Cape-Town he decided to transfer from the Gun Section to the 49th Battalion of the Regiment.

His entry into this Battalion resulted in a disturbance the next night in camp, through which the Montgomeryshires lost one-fifth of their horses. Now, horses were as valuable as men in chasing the mobile Boer and this was a very black mark against him. Bob, of course, maintained he had been in the right over what had happened.

A sentry had come off guard and called 8175 who was next on duty. The sentry was at fault in this; he should have waited to be relieved. As 8175 proved difficult to wake the sentry jogged him with his foot. Bob, thus awakened, sprang at the man and went for him hammer and tongs in and out of frightened tethered horses. No sooner had the first animals begun to neigh, than the horse lines were in confusion, especially as there were a number of mules among them. These kicked and strained at their leashes; ropes broke, pegs flew, horses stampeded, alarm bugles sounded; troopers rushed out with rifles, confident that the camp had been surprised by marauding Boer prisoners who were known to have escaped and had been sniping them all day. It took three hours to achieve some kind of order, and at roll-call next morning one-fifth of the horses were struck 'off the strength' of the regiment.

Trooper Loraine barely re-established himself after coming off a week's C.B., by being the first man to fix a bayonet and charge and dispatch a mad ostrich which was storming through camp and again scattering the horses.

These were the incidents that broke the monotony of life at Maitland Camp outside Cape-Town. The Yeomanry then marched sixty miles to Stellenbosch, where they underwent six weeks' acclimatisation. As they were expecting to go straight into action, this hanging-about maddened the troopers who were full-blooded, uncontrollable fellows, in contrast to their mild and anæmic officers. They could not understand that the eight weeks' training they had had before they sailed from England was all too short a period to turn a civilian into a soldier; and that they now had to learn to bivouac, to meet sunstroke by day and frostbite by night; to become marksmen, take cover, fend for their horses, and dig and lie in trenches or stand to arms in them for hours and hours. They thought they could be used to better purpose fighting in the front ranks of the Army, and did not hesitate to write and tell Lord Roberts so.

The letter—a petition—begging to serve in *his advance column*, under him, *him*, *HIM*, was signed by every trooper in the Squadron, 8175 in his place among them, and sent over the heads of their Colonel and officers, to Lord Roberts.

The answer was many weeks in coming, and only one incident broke the monotony of waiting. One evening Trooper Loraine heard his name called outside the tent where he was resting with fifteen others. He lifted the flap and saw a horseman dismounting. This man had ridden up to a sentry, asked for the Montgomeryshires and been told he was among them—"Don't you know me?" he cried.

"Take off your helmet," said Bob, and still failed to recognise him. The newcomer then mentioned the name of a mutual friend and Harley Street; suddenly it burst back on Bob that this was his great friend, Stewart,[1] whom he had failed to recognise owing to the total dissociation in his mind between South Africa and Harley Street. But the remarkable point about this visit was that Stewart—also serving with the Forces—had, with perfect instinct, made a bee-line for Bob: he had but a few hours in which to see him, and, on arriving at the reserve camp of 20,000 men, had alighted at random

[1]Later, Sir James Purves-Stewart, K.C.M.G., the neurologist.

among 1,500 tents, and stopped outside the very one belonging to the man he had ridden 200 miles to see.

They sat out all night and talked. A curious night, in which kopjes on the sky-line seemed to leave their appointed places and loom closer and closer up until they descended on them in torrential showers. During the downpours they went under a tent, and when it was fine, came out again. The long talk left Bob on an even keel. It was not that he was needing to see a neurologist or that he lacked comrades. But he did need to see a man to whom he could open his mind. Mentally and spiritually he was flagging under the delays of seeing no service and the endless menial tasks of life as a Tommy: the shining of boot-leather, belt-leather, horse-hide and harness; the cleaning of latrines and stables, and perpetual saluting—to what purpose?

At last the Regiment went on to Paarl where they bivouacked in a 'most exquisite enchanted valley' according to 8175; from there they led their horses through the mountains to Wellington; and at Worcester, entrained in open cattle-trucks for Bloemfontein.

"At Bloemfontein, on May 28th, our Squadron formed the bodyguard for General Pretyman when he read Roberts's Proclamation annexing the Orange Free State now to be called Orange River Colony," says Robert in a long letter to Cousin Florence.

"Pretyman was the man, you may remember, who led Cronje across the battlefield of Paardeburg to Roberts, after our victory there had virtually turned the Boer Army. Pretyman is a great fellow, and needs to be, for no sooner does he disarm the Province and restore farms to burghers who promise to be loyal and accept the Queen's Pardon, than de Wet comes skirmishing through, and the burghers dig up fresh rifles from their cattle-kraals and either join him or turn snipers.

"We had a nasty instance of this when we marched from Bloemfontein to Boshof, disarming the country, across the old battlefields of Abraham's Kraal and the Modder River, on to Bulfontein.

"On entering one valley, three of our fellows were picked off, sniped from a farmhouse. Our machine-gun opened fire, and at that the farmhouse and three others close by, flew white table-cloths in sign of submission. But as we rode up to them our flanks were again mown with rifle-fire.

"Reprisals were ordered. Every farmhouse in the valley had to be burned. They were seized and cleared. All of them held women and children; when it came to the burning not a man could be found. We shall never know whether we were fired at by men or by women.

"We brought out the women and a chair for each of them, and they sat stolidly on the veldt watching us burn their homes. I felt deeply ashamed, as we had not come out to fight women, and I could not help feeling sorry for them. They never uttered a word. I wondered if their husbands and brothers were hidden in the hills around us. Suddenly, loud above the crackling flames came the rattle of rifle-fire. Terrific rifle-fire, but not a shot reaching us. *Each house held thousands of rounds of ammunition which the heat was detonating.* And still the Boer women sat stolidly on the veldt and neither spoke nor moved.

"I felt sorry for them no longer. Yet, when one of our fellows spoke insultingly to one of them, we thrashed him.

"At Vet River I went out with 19 others to escort the West Riding Regiment to Smalldeel to join the Lancashires. We were supposed to be back in camp the same night, so we went with stripped saddles, no blankets or cloaks. And I can't tell you how we regretted going without these, for if the sun burns by day, it freezes hard at night, and instead of one day's trip, we did not re-join the Squadron *for about five weeks.* When we got to Smalldeel we found the place in momentary expectation of an attack. De Wet was about, and the O.C., kept us there to go out on patrol and look for the enemy. Unfortunately we did not find him so we all went on to Welgelegen.

"Here I was on duty, scouting and patrolling for three days and two nights with about four hours' sleep all told. When I was not scouting, I was down in a donga guarding the spare horses that were kept saddled and bridled up, day and night.

Then I took a turn in the trenches and lay for hours and hours in burning sun and soaking rain alternately. A man called Nel works with de Wet, and is almost as good as he is at making fools of our generals; but the O.C., was determined not to be caught.

"At one time we actually saw the enemy advancing over the plain, and the regulars who were with us—a battalion of the Lancashires—opened fire at them, although they were out of range. At this moment a train from down the line came into the siding with about 800 troops in open cattle trucks, and the Boers, seeing these reinforcements, cleared off, so we were cheated out of our fight.

"We stayed on patrolling the surrounding country for some weeks and then were ordered to rejoin the Squadron at Vet River. We were terribly sick at having to go back to them, as our best chance of fighting was to be out on detachment." (Note: it was during these weeks' patrolling that the fight at Sand River took place. Characteristically, Robert does not think this worth mentioning, as in a later letter he explains: ' there was shell-fire but no shot came near me.')

"At that time I had exchanged from the Gun Section of the Regiment to the 49th Battalion, as H——, the officer in command of the guns, and I, could not hit it off at all. But H—— has now gone sick with enteric, and is being invalided home, so at the special request of the Sergeant, who has stepped into command, I am re-joining it.

"About 40 per cent of our men are down with enteric, dysentery and fever. One officer and five men out of the Squadron have died. Although we have done little fighting, we have had great hardships to endure: days and nights in the pouring rain with no tents, lying at night in the mud with a blanket round you which freezes stiff as soon as the rain ceases; or at sundown, on top of a blazing hot day, experiencing a sudden drop in temperature of 30 degrees. Short rations and bad water have also played havoc. For days now, we have had no more than a biscuit (hard tack), and a small piece of bully beef, and when scouting, only half a bar of chocolate, although we have sometimes been passing through a land of plenty. But

even to catch a stray chicken is held to be looting and severely punished. We cling to the fiction that these sniping farmers are loyal British subjects, ever since we have annexed the Orange Free State, and called it Orange River Colony.

"I cannot find words to express my disappointment and rage at seeing no fighting, although I have done useful work, I know. It is maddening to be out of all the scraps.

"When we arrived at Bloemfontein, weeks ago, our Colonel was ordered to proceed on the same train up to Roberts. But he *de-trained*, saying he could not go without his whole battalion complete. Then, at Bloemfontein, we sent a Petition—the second—signed by every man excepting two or three in the Squadron, asking Lord Roberts to give us work with him. The reply came in orders to the Colonel, *once again*, to join the column. This time the Colonel said his horses were not fit, although there are none in better condition in all Africa. As it is a privilege to go up to Pretoria, which has been twice refused, we are shelved as far as Roberts's column is concerned.

"At the moment, as there is no work with the guns, I am detached from the Squadron, serving as Galloper to the acting Brigadier: Colonel Lloyd. He is a splendid fellow, and I have seized the opportunity to ask him to get me a transfer into Roberts's Horse, Kitchener's Horse, or the Kaffrarian Rifles. Of course, it will be a very exceptional thing, but I think Lloyd is almost sure to fix it, then I shall proceed to join them *North of Pretoria*.

"They are a very rough lot, as tough as they make them, but they are fighting men, and I never felt so full of suppressed venom and fight in my life. You can address my letters to the Gun Section as before, as I will arrange to have them forwarded, if my hope is realised.

"I don't dislike my present work, which is riding with dispatches to the different camps. I am on duty twenty-four hours of the day. Waiting outside the Brigade Office—where I am now writing—during the day, and sleeping in the Commandant's House at night, where I am frequently roused to ride out to some camp in the early hours of the morning.

"This is the first time I have slept under a roof since being

out here, and I have certainly come to prefer sleeping under the sky.

"Now, Florence, I must thank you once again. The £5 in your last letter places me under another obligation to you which it will be a delight to re-pay. I am trying to get a set of Kruger money for your Museum. I have had a good deal of Kruger silver every now and again, but have been unable to keep it owing to pressing necessities. When we were at Bloemfontein, Kruger pennies were selling at £4 each; but if it is to be done, I will bring you a set of Kruger coinage.

"I am sending you a parcel by this mail containing two cartridges of films—the last, they are unprocurable—and a Boer bandolier picked up on the battlefield of Abraham's Kraal on the march to Boshof. It is, as you will see, home-made out of a woman's dress. Isn't that a poetic combination of peace and war? It was made to carry Martini Henry cartridges, not Mauser's.

"Then, there is a King Locust in a little box. He was given me by a Tommy who caught him and stuck a pin through him. I put him in a box and tried to kill him with paraffin, the only likely thing I could get hold of, but he is still alive and kicking. I wish he would die, it seems so brutal to keep him. You will easily discern his kingly crown and interesting markings.

"I have told you I hope to be transferred to Roberts's Horse. No one can possibly tell how long the War will last, but I don't intend leaving this country without seeing some good fighting. That's what I came out for, and I won't be happy till I get it.

"At the same time, I have had a cable from Dan Frohman, the crack American Manager, offering me £30 a week for a two season's engagement in New York. This is to commence in November next, or as soon as I am free to go to him.

"He evidently knows I am hard-up, or he would have offered me more. But I would accept the engagement, only for the fact that I shall have to spend £100 on an outfit to go to America, as I may confess to you now, Florence, I sold all my things before I 'listed.

"I might, of course, remain here, after the War, and make

a little money, so as to return to England in some degree of prosperous style. Of course, by going to New York I would pay off all my debts in a few months and save some money; but I hate the idea of running into more debt to enable me to get clear.

"And I must not *waste* America, where I know there is a great deal of money waiting for me.

"One thing is certain, humanly speaking, and that is that nothing will induce me to place myself again—for I have only myself to blame—in the ignominious position of being really short of money.

"This excursion—I can really call it no more as I have seen no fighting—is having lasting good effects on my character. It is giving me time to think, and *think*, and THINK."

There is no doubt that much of his time was spent in inner self-deprecation hidden by outer bombast. But a stop was soon to be put to this thinking, for whether it was Colonel Lloyd's report on the War-ardour of the Montgomeryshires, or Lord Roberts's own response to the Round Robins, who can say; but the Yeomanry were peremptorily summoned once more to join the Field Marshal's column.

They entrained in open cattle trucks for Pretoria, bivouacked on the Capital's race-course, and were straightway divided into small units detailed to flying columns of regulars. These columns pressed North, always farther North into the Transvaal. As soon as the Montgomeryshires were initiated into the work, the Regiment formed Flying Squads of its own. *Then* followed days packed with such hardship, action and enterprise—in ceaseless fighting and sniping in mountain fastnesses round Lyndenburg: in gruelling shell and rifle-fire at Warmbads: in a daily span of twenty hours in the saddle, crossing and re-crossing and reconnoitring round the crocodile River—as would have satiated the most war-and-venture-greedy.

Even sleep was not undisturbed; for weeks at a stretch the troopers were only to have an average of three to four hours rest a night. They were forbidden to light fires for fear of snipers: ordered to boil water for fear of enteric. But their

tongues were so often swollen with thirst that they would throw themselves down beside the first water-hole, even when it was filled with the putrefying remains of a horse or mule, and suck up water that was coated with green slime.

Spring was over the Transvaal, horses could graze anywhere on the fresh young green of the Veldt. (Hitherto the fodder transport for overseas horses had been a grave problem, as only the indigenous Boer ponies would feed off the dry stubble of the Winter veldt). Now distance for horses was no longer impeded by lack of forage the British became as mobile as the Boer, and it was the men who had to subsist as best they could. No commissariat could be equipped to keep in touch with them and bring them supplies; the troopers were hungrier than the vultures which swooped down expectantly if one of them was wounded.

Reveille was at 2 a.m. when the men were usually shaken awake by a sentry instead of being roused by a bugle; the first grey streak of dawn showed them in the saddle, bent low over their horses, chasing the Boer, the flitting Boer.

Did they come to the base of a kopje, as often as not they met rifle-fire. The procedure never varied. Every fourth trooper took charge of four horses and tried to get behind a rock. The rest stormed up the hill, taking such cover as they could find. They would reach the first trench to find themselves enfiladed from a second; storm that and be enfiladed from a third; take the third—with half their men killed or wounded by devastatingly accurate fire—and arrive at the top, only to see the Boers riding serenely away with a spare horse to every man, to repeat the trick on the next high ground.

The pursuit was almost always unavailing.

From the North the Flying Squads turned down East into the Orange River Colony again and the Drakensberg Mountains. Here, the action at Wittebergen was an event. Luck was with the British and generalship. One evening, just before sundown they surrounded four columns of the enemy under the various commandos, among whom was de Wet. After a very little sharp fighting, the Boers surrendered, and arrangements were made to take them prisoners at dawn. But will-o'-the-

wisp de Wet, crafty and well-acquainted with the country, escaped with his column during the night.

The rest were taken prisoners in the morning and marched to Winberg where they were entrained for the base. "Throughout the march," records 8175, "we gave our prisoners hot meals while we continued to eat corned beef. But we did at least have an adequate ration of corned beef as down here we are in touch with ample supplies."

Ensued a long dash northwards from Winberg, back into the Transvaal, to prevent de Wet effecting a juncture with Botha. In spite of delays and the Boers' slightly superior mounting, they came in sight of de Wet, and the two columns raced together in sight but out of range, for Warmbads. "Warmbads was an unpretentious place," records 8175, "boasting one hotel, a hot spring, a few corrugated bath-houses and a handful of huts. But a great deal depended on the issue, for it contained the only water for many miles and it was for the sake of watering our horses we raced.

"The Boers beat us by a neck. They took possession of Warmbads just before sundown. With half an hour of light in which to do it, we were ordered to clear them out. And we did, in so determined a manner that when we burst into the hotel, we found rows of half-full glasses, filled with spring water, standing on the bars, and gratefully swallowed the drinks the Boers could not stay to finish."

In this way both sides watered their horses, camped outside the town and resumed the chase in the morning. Just North of Warmbads there was a defile; by the time the Yeomanry reached it, the heights were strongly occupied by the Boer. Under heavy fire, the head of the column passed through, then it was reckoned that the casualties on the whole column would be too heavy for the advantage gained. The advance was stopped; the head had to be recalled and ran the gauntlet once more. Then the British pretended to bivouac at the mouth of the gorge. At sundown they took advantage of a moonless night to leap into the saddle and make a detour after de Wet again.

But there was no satisfaction to be had out of fighting the Boer.

Even the prisoners 8175 took some days later, three snipers whom he tracked down with infinite care, surrendered immediately he came upon them, as it happened that their ammunition was exhausted. Humorously, his ammunition had also come to an end. Bob offered to box or wrestle with any of them for their freedom—reprehensibly, but he felt like doing anything to get to grips with the Boer—but the men did not understand, and kept their hands high above their heads. They thought his rifle was loaded. The blow he dealt the youngest Boer provoked no gesture, so he drove them in, chancing to meet a fellow-trooper half-way. These two, with their three prisoners, stopped at a farm flying white cloths, for a drink.

It was a piece of sheer bravado, and it was perhaps right that the drink should have finished Loraine. There was no escape of prisoners, nothing dramatic, just queer water. He was used to bad water, Heaven knows, but not to whatever it was the Dutch girl put into that drink.

The next letter Florence received was a scrawl from the Imperial Branch Yeomanry Hospital, Eastwood, Arcadia, Pretoria, dated December, 1900.

"I have just got in here after two and a half months hard fighting in the bush-veldt," it says. "I am not wounded, but just stiffened up with rheumatism, ptomaine and fever. Ptomaine was the real trouble. Nothing in the least serious, so you need not feel anxious.

"We have been out on flying columns pretty well the whole time. First with Paget, then with Baden-Powell, Hickman, Plumer. We took Warmbads, and got farthest North of any troops in the Transvaal, right up to Nylstroom.

"They want us to stay out here doing police-work, but I don't intend doing anything of the sort. The rebellion in China seems to be assuming alarming proportions, and if I did not feel I had other pressing duties, I should be very much inclined to volunteer for service out there —*with a commission*—but as it is, I intend to devote myself to my professional work until certain desirable results are obtained.

"It's America for me, and I will be writing you more definitely next mail."

He did not write her by the next mail because he was steaming out of Durban on a Hospital ship, seeing the last of Africa, and convinced that he was a very different man from the fellow who had come out nine months before.

Actually, he had only grown thinner and was sporting a moustache. He had also become weather-worn, and like the coat—in which he had landed—overlaid with certain tones from this experience.

Chief among them was the impression that a man is only half a man, unhorsed: an inevitable result of prolonged hard-riding. He would miss riding down the open, for all the accompanying saddle-stiffness, smarting eyes, hunger and thirst. Who wouldn't miss chasing down rainbow distances between smiling or thunderous kopjes? Or heading into valleys between mountains so stupendously grotesque a man forgot that they hid death.

But better than recollections of scouting, or tearing down the valleys with his Colt machine-gun jolting behind him, were the memories of those occasional nights when the Flying Squads would return to some strong British base to re-furbish. Then the troopers were allowed to light roaring camp-fires under the glittering skies, and to sing choruses round them, like "Left like a dog on the doorstep to die," and: "Who'll break the news to mother?" How Bob revelled in these. When the chorus was over he would cap it with burning speeches from *d'Artagnan* or *Henry V.* He now dreamed of realising stage successes, huge stage successes, easier to capture by far than the elusive Boer. The soldier had returned to the artist.

There was also a memory of Welsh voices singing in unaccompanied four-part harmony round the camp-fires. Such voices belonged to the glories of the earth. He would put them on the stage one day. He longed to enrich the world with his memories.

One there was, however, as strong as any, which he could not transmit. A roast pig. It had been a wild pig, bayonetted on the veldt, disembowelled, stuffed into a biscuit tin, and

roasted in an ant-heap. Until the advent of that pig, he had never known he was a glutton, but, oh, what a change the succulent pork had made to the daily strip of dry biltong! He and a fellow dispatch-rider had fed like kings for a week. What a pig!

He was weary of hardships: of poor food, scanty baths, and inadequate de-lousing. He had only twice tasted eggs, until he went into hospital, where he also had butter and milk. At civilised centres like Bloemfontein, eggs had been 2/ each, butter 4/- a pound, milk a frightening price, what could he do on 10d. a day?

Had it not been for Florence's £5, which enabled him to buy fruit, and now and then a boiling fowl, or fresh meat, his health would have been seriously impaired.

He knew he would receive the Queen's medal (actually he received the Queen's medal with three clasps—Wittebergen; Transvaal; Cape Colony), but more acceptable than the thought of any medal had been the Queen's Christmas Box of Chocolates, because of the hardships.

So, self-sacrifice was no longer his aim. He had done his bit. The desire for adventure remained, but first, he decided, he must make money. He must become rich, rich, rich, because money alone could provide independence, the open sesame to bliss.

Dan Frohman's cable was working.

CHAPTER IV

IN AMERICA he arrived in the late Spring of 1901 and took the lead in *To Have and To Hold*—an indifferent version of Mary Johnson's novel *By Order of the Company*. Immediately he became known as New York's ' most beautiful man.'

He was surprised, a little shocked, and extremely amused. It was really rather a lark to have this American Beauty follow-up to his service in the Boer War.

He knew, of course, that his performance in the play must have been very bad because he had felt no ' first-night ' nerves. In fact, he couldn't understand why every one backstage was getting so het up. Why the fuss? Making his face up had seemed so absurd, that he had wiped it all off and gone on stage as he was. He had set about his part with the same briskness he would have accorded to any task on the veldt. Artistically, the result was horrible. But this was only discernible to the expert; to the casual eye Bob was correct in appearance and action. Only an actor would have known he was right outside the enchanted circle, well outside his part.

As soon as *To Have and To Hold* closed, he was starred as the Beauty Boy in *Frocks and Frills*, a musical comedy in which he played Noel, Viscount Doughton. In this he received a slight percentage of the profits in addition to his salary. Money was easy to earn; Florence's initial loan was soon repaid. He lodged himself in a pent-house roof flat with a Japanese servant who waited on him like a shadow. He rode a white horse every morning, and the days could not have been pleasanter. He didn't have to *work* for this luxury, he had only to walk through a part on stage—it happened to be the leading part—but really, he had only to smile and show his figure, and the female population responded. He had a large woman following.

One day sensibility returned to him. He woke to the

horror of this ' good-looking lead ' business. Just as ' Gibson girls ' were being a hit in London Musical Comedy, he saw that for months past he had been no more than a Gibson man. And this was odd, because he had meant to bring back so much emotional and intellectual beauty to the stage, but for some reason he had failed on his return to fit back into the theatre. Perhaps this was because he had started in New York, where he had promptly lost sight of himself. Ever since landing he had been living in a curious state of detachment, enjoying the sights and sounds of a strange country, luxuriating in unaccustomed body-comforts—shower-baths, ice-cubes at every meal, grape-fruit (unobtainable in England), elevators, electric fans—trivialities which had surprised and delighted an ex-trooper. Then again, he was fascinated by the highly individualised viewpoint of America and the *pep* of New York. He was fully taken up, *experiencing*! He had forgotten he had to create; did not even wish to create.

Now, something stirred. He understood that the label, Beautiful Bob, which he had looked upon as a quaint notion ticketing some one else, belonged to him and to no one else but him; realised that his main professional asset was not artistry, nor intelligence, but just a form of catchy good-looks that were being further cheapened by being sold as his beauty—and was revolted. This was not he, the joke must cease. But he was under contract and had to play the show out to the end. As soon as the final curtain fell, however, he rushed back to England to live in a room without mirrors and perpetrate atrocities on his appearance. He cropped his hair short so that he looked like a convict, but still could not do away with his slightly pouting lips and very blue eyes. His face was more than ever conspicuous. "What's the matter with you, Bob?" asked a friend. "You look most fearfully odd. Trying to give an impression of ' smouldering fires,' or something?" Do what he could, he did not seem able to throw off his looks.

Characteristically, he swerved right away from himself, cut out the cushioned comfort and rather luxurious style of living that was his wont, becoming stoical and austere. This lasted until his self-respect was restored by Ben Greet's

invitation to be the star visiting player to his boyhood's company in *Henry V.*

Bob was twenty-six when he played Henry, in silver armour on a white charger, in the open, at Stratford-on-Avon. His face and body vibrated with romance. He believed in the speeches, delivered them with fire, and was the King incarnate.

"My boy," said old Ben Greet, after the first performance, "when Westmoreland drew your horse nearer the camp-fire so that we had its flicker running up your armour, and held a torch to light your face for the Agincourt speech, I never saw any one look so beautiful. . . ."

"What, again!" asked Bob, despairingly, and would not be consoled until he heard that his voice and feeling were as good as his looks.

He played the part four times a week that summer all over England, and ended it with a short run in London. This interlude—it was not a money-making proposition—was idyllic. He rode from town to town on the white charger, through Warwickshire, Shropshire and the Welsh border, thereby tasting some of the delights that had been dear to Harry. How lovely, he thought, it would be, if he could always summer in England: know birdsong, buttercup fields and the scent of wild rose in the hedges; and return to America in the Autumn —scentless, songless, but exhilarating America—to make money.

He was determined not to make his New York fortune on his good looks, however, but by some artistic conquest that would bring him the professional recognition that was his due. So intending, he went back to America and increased his reputation in *Pretty Peggy*, opposite Grace George's brilliantly-faceted Peg Woffington. Then, in an adaptation of rather a grim German play, he added the title 'fine actor' to his 'fine looks.' But plays were difficult to find, and managers insisted on casting him for the good-looking, charming juvenile which gave him no scope. Yet he was in demand, and there was an all-round willingness to star him if a suitable vehicle could be found.

It was finding the vehicle that caused him to fret and fume.

Managers read plays; he read plays; and producers sent him plays ear-marked 'sure-fire,' which were, he declared, insulting to the intelligence. In every form of literature—novels, short stories and verse—thought was taking a new turn. Only the theatre stayed backward, and the plays Bob read were the stalest and most backward of all.

All these dramas were ground out of the old conventional love-bosh and Bob was in a prophetic mood! He must—he would—bring something fresh to the theatre, or give up acting.

Back came the old urge to do something new. He went through torments. It was nearly four years since he had tasted hardship, and as he looked down on New York from his pent-house roof-flat, he wondered whether he had grown soft. How much did his Jap servant, his silk dressing-gowns, his athletics and massage, and piquantly contrasting exotic meals, his horses and his comforts, count? How much did his friends? They were legion, in the East and in the West of America, where, during the Summers he had spent in the States he had gone cowboy. Oh, he had had a good time. Yet, how he wished he had accepted that Mandarin's proposal eighteen months before to go to China as a machine-gun expert. It would have meant doing something real. He was surfeited with make-believe. He wanted to announce some startling truth. How? Where? He must find an outlet. But, as usual, he was not able to move, because he was living to the top of his income; Bobbie was a man of fashion, and an actor had to live well to draw a good salary in New York. But, just wait till he had money to spare! Mouth any more of this drivel he would not. Life held better things to do, he had only to find them.

Just as he was wanting to seize life by the throat and make it cough up opportunities, he was compelled to seize a manager by the throat, speaking metaphorically, and make him cough up five months' salary. The manager had placed him under a long contract and then decided to withdraw the production when it was in rehearsal. Bobbie insisted he should be paid whether work was found for him or not. In those days there was no Actor's Equity, and it was considered very courageous

for an actor to stand up to a manager; the action brought him into prominence at once.

Winning it, he decided to help the manager out by playing a sketch in Vaudeville, and accordingly wrote his own. It was of an Ancient Chinee who killed his wife because she was unfaithful to him. After a great deal of by-play the frightened child-wife staggered to him with the mighty sword of his ancestors: he would not sully it on her throat, however, and snapped her neck between his forefinger and thumb.

The little sketch was good theatre and hailed as novel, because the lead—Bob—never spoke. All the effects were made by the child-wife's frightened twittering against his unchanging smile. Here was a change from playing colourless juveniles, and he made it with artistic success. But although the sketch was hailed as novel, he knew it was old, as he had drawn half the tricks in it from a Chinese Tragedy he had played fifteen years ago at the Sailor's Dive. Poor going for a man who wished to cleave through the horizon on a new road.

At this juncture, a miracle occurred.

As Bob, himself, wrote: "I was desperately considering some other way of making a living when, on a train journey from Boston to New York, I read *Man and Superman*.

"Whether I cried Eureka or no, I knew at once this was a marvellous play—simply bound to succeed in the theatre—and danced a jig of delight up and down the corridor of the train, elated beyond bounds by the brilliance of the book itself, and rejoicing at the prospect of producing and acting in a masterpiece.

"Here, at last, was a play, a play with a difference. Not only would I be rescued from the necessity of acting the comparative bosh that had been suggested, but I could do work in the theatre of which I would be proud. And I knew beyond doubt that fortune would ensue as well as fame.

"It did not enter my head for a moment that the managers who were seeking a play in which to 'star' me, could fail to see the irresistible quality of *Man and Superman* as a *commercial proposition*; that is, as a Big Profit-making Success, quite apart from its merits as a great and enlightening piece of work. And

it was an absolute facer to me when they thought I was insane in suggesting it. 'Not a play at all,' they said. 'Just talk!'

"In vain I tried to persuade them that *Man and Superman* would provide entertainment for every grade of intelligence. They recoiled at the name of author and play. At that time, Shaw's plays were regarded in America as being so highly intellectual that only a minority or 'cult,' could be expected to enjoy or *pay* to see them.

†"True, that Richard Mansfield, America's leading actor, had played *Arms and the Man* for several weeks in New York, and later on included it in his repertory on tour, following this up with a full-dress New York production of *The Devil's Disciple*, which had a colossal box-office success and lifted him from the rank of a touring actor with a repertory, to a fixed position in New York, comparable to that of Irving in London. But the managers would have that the success was Mansfield's not Shaw's; and Mansfield had done nothing to discourage this impression, especially after he had refused to venture on Shaw's *Cæsar and Cleopatra* and received from the author by cable the two words: "Farewell Pompey." †

"I would probably have had less trouble if Shaw had been totally unknown. As it was, I read the play to fifteen managers who were anxious to pay me good money for acting in other plays they proposed. But they would have nothing to do with it. Lee Shubert alone made me a suggestion after I had read the play to him six times. The sixth time I boarded a night train with him (to fill his spare time on the journey) and he listened to *Superman* critically from 1.30 a.m. to 8 a.m. and then said over morning coffee: "There may be something in this, Bob. Let's try it out in a small town with a cheap company."

"No, Lee," I replied. "We must play it in the finest theatre on Broadway with a first-rate company, rather lavishly overmounted by way of scenery to take away from any suspicion that it is intellectual."

"He smiled at me pityingly, and left me to rave.

"But I had seen too many uncertain plays ruined by hack

†Mr. Shaw has interpolated between.†

companies in dingy surroundings, to consent to such treatment."

The truth was, Lee Shubert had only made the suggestion as a generous concession to a fellow-traveller. If Bob was hoarse with reading against train noises, Lee was deaf with listening. Besides, what other manager would have given up his sleep even on a night journey to re-considering a crazy play that showed no signs of making money.

"Where's the plot in it, Bob?" asked the managers. "What's it about?"

"It's about a woman chasing a man," replied Bob, desperate as to how to make the blind see.

"And whoever heard of such a thing?" replied one manager. "Do you suppose that that will appeal to the women in the audience? Has a woman ever chased you? Say, has she, Bob, or have they? *Have they?* Tell me."

And Bob said, 'Shut up,' and blushed, and turned away. Because it was firmly held in those days that advances could not be, should not be, and were not made by women to men. The chase was exclusively the man's prerogative: and men who knew otherwise thought their experience too odd and unique ever to be mentioned. "It's indullicate, that's what it is," pronounced the manager. "*Indullicate.*"

Nothing daunted by either the alleged indelicacy or boredom of the piece, Bob set about negotiating the purchase of the performing rights, by cable. Since no manager would buy the play as a vehicle for him to 'star' in, he would buy it for himself. Here again he met with obstruction and delay which he attributed to his obscurity as a potential manager. †The truth was that Shaw, though he had spotted Bob, years before in London, at first sight as a leading juvenile of the first quality, thought of him only as an actor who accepted engagements, not as a manager who launched plays;† whilst Robert believed that Mansfield—leader of the American stage and the first to introduce Shaw to the States—was bidding against him. What chance had he against Mansfield?

"I imagine," says Robert, "that Shaw must have been dis-

†Mr. Shaw has interpolated between.†

pleased over some detail in his transactions with Mansfield, for I eventually received a cable granting me the American rights of *Man and Superman* for a payment of £200 down in advance of 10% of the gross receipts. The same cable said that the English rights could not be negotiated.

"The payment of £200 left little of my savings, and as all my efforts to secure financial backing for the production of the play had failed, I crossed to England to try and persuade friends at home to invest in this profitable venture."

His horses, his flat, and his Jap had already vanished in the melting-pot. He was saving every penny to put towards *Man and Superman.* Now, his passage-money and the need to make some show of prosperity in England, involved the sale of his library. It was due to collecting that library that he had read *Man and Superman.* Shaw's works were difficult to come by then, they were only issued in limited editions; as Shaw himself estimated, at that time he had only a small band of enthusiasts, say 1,000 readers, for every published work. Robert had left word with Shaw's publishers eight years before to send him every book as it came out. He had done this ever since reading a rather flattering mention of himself in Shaw's stage criticisms in the *Saturday Review*; thereupon obtaining a copy of *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, he had found himself straightway very much at home, he says, "in a new world of electrifying thought, where ideas hitherto vaguely perceived in the shadow of one's mind were crystallised into phrases of startling and exhilarating clarity." In this way he had read Shaw down the years, but it was not until he came to *Man and Superman* that he saw how a Shaw play would bring him his chance.

Then he sold up everything once again to follow an idea: burned his boats theatrically, for managers thought he was dotty; and out of his library of early Wells, Kipling, Hardy and many others, there remained only the book of *Man and Superman* which weighed down his trouser-pocket like a gold-mine. A potential Gold-mine if only some one else would see it as a gold-mine and supply the workings. Whom could he persuade? That was the problem, and whenever the thought

oppressed him he drew out the play and it opened for him the gates of Heaven.

Marvellous, marvellous play!

Luckily he was not to be the only one to think so much longer. Even as the ship slid up the Solent—just as he was wondering how best he could present the proposition to Florence—a telegram was handed to him from Charles Frohman, requesting to see him at the Savoy Hotel directly he reached London.

"At the end of the interview with Frohman," says Robert, "I went to my room and put into writing the agreement we had reached. It was to the effect that I was to have complete control of the production, casting and staging, in fact everything behind the curtain, and also to approve the theatre—while Mr. Frohman would finance the enterprise and business manage it entirely, for the privilege of presenting *Man and Superman* to the American public.

"This happy solution of my problem had been brought about by the fact that the Stage Society had produced the play on the previous Sunday, while I was on the high seas coming from America. *Man and Superman* had been hailed by the Press as a masterpiece, and Frohman (the only New York manager I had been unable to read the play to, owing to his absence in England) had wished to add it to his list of New York Autumn productions, and been referred to me as owner of the American rights."

So were the tables of Fortune turned. Bob was no longer 'a lunatic going around broke to the world with nothing more in his pocket or on his mind than the script of an impossible play.' He was the discerning owner of 'the most startling stage play for two hundred years,' a 'theatrical bombshell.' And he had received three times the sum he had paid for it in advance of royalties, as an advance of his own salary—a loan from Charles Frohman. The cheque lay snug in his wallet. He had formulated the business arrangements on his own terms, and they were princely terms; he now looked ahead to fame and fortune as inevitably as he looked out on to a red-gold Thames flowing in the sunset before his win-

dows, swirling between dun barges out of a molten West. Symbolic, that, he thought, the golden, molten West.

All this happened on the evening of May 3rd, 1905. *Superman* was not to be produced in New York till the Autumn. 'He was twenty-nine,' reflected Robert, as he tweaked a dinner-tie in front of the mirror, 'and he had reached the summit!' He thought he would spend a short summer in England before returning to America. But he was not very clear as to what he thought, for he was spinning on a pinnacle of bliss. He would go down the Strand to see what they were playing in the London theatres and how they were playing it. Whatever his mood, he never could keep away long from theatres. But he knew full well, before he went, that they would only be playing all the same old things in modern comedy: modern, in the sense that it purported to represent the habits of the period, but was entirely without any quality of illumination; as the one play of ideas, the play with the constant shimmer as of inter-penetrating summer lightning, was *Superman*, which belonged to him.

Ta-ra-ra, he would have liked to have given voice to his joy, but he was much too happy to sing.

It seems odd to read in Robert's diary that: "Such is the stir created by *Man and Superman*, it has been put immediately into the bill at the Court Theatre for *a series of matinées*."

The play had been hailed as a masterpiece, but Shaw had not yet broken into the commercial theatre and a series of matinées was all that the pundits would give it. Yet Shaw's were the plays to be taken subsequently by repertory companies, in every language, to the ends of the earth.

Robert went to a matinée and records: "The production misses every point I have seen. Every highlight is obscured. From a technical point of view, comedy can only be transmitted by the serious and sincere belief of the actors in their situations. Instead of this, every joke is underlined and thrown at the audience as if to say, 'Isn't this droll and delectable?' in a manner quite outside the purpose of their characters.

"Granville-Barker was disguised by a red beard, giving a

portrayal of Tanner as a mock imitation of Shaw. By nearly every other member of the cast the *action* of the comedy was being similarly checked, instead of projected for its series of unique and dynamic shocks and twists. Shaw, whom I met during an interval in the foyer, gave me *carte blanche* to go ahead and produce the play for the points I see."

The fact is that whatever Robert's views may have been, they counted for little beside his overwhelming anticipation of success. Accustomed as Shaw was to the worship of his followers—the highly-gifted Granville-Barker became for a while a mere Shavian wraith—none of them brought him the success-conviction of this wholly non-precious youth—this vigorous Bob Loraine who kept on assuring him that *Superman* would beat all money-making records, and yet who was not so occupied with the money side as with the 'spreading of a new and joyous form of thought.' Other Shavian followers held that the time was not yet ripe for the great prophet to be widely understood. "Nonsense!" said Robert. "The greater the prophet, the better the people's understanding, the wider the hearing." Here was faith of the right kind; no wonder Shaw allowed him to take charge.

And Robert's blood was on fire. He was not in the least disillusioned by meeting Shaw, whom he had already pictured as a combination of the 'Archangel Michael, with whirling sword; Moses, who had communed with the Lord and was destined to lead Israel out of captivity; St. Joan of Arc, consumed by a single purpose that was not her own purpose, and a few others besides. Shaw topped them all.' Robert says so.

"He has sharp bright-blue penetrating seer's eyes," he wrote, "with the impish twinkle of a schoolboy. A transparent delicate alabaster skin, which gives him the appearance of being not at all of common clay, but having the minimum of earth and maximum of fire in his composition. A lightning conductor, a visitant, who makes other men look not so clean nor fresh as he.

"I had expected his voice to have reverberations of the thunder, but it is high-pitched, clear and flexible as a violin's.

He says: 'In a minute,' not 'in a minnit,' and speaks with the most persuasive variant of English I have ever heard, a satin-Irish brogue.

"Mrs. Shaw was with him. He introduced me to her."

Next day he lunched with them at Adelphi Terrace, where they talked mostly of the production of *Man and Superman* in New York. Shaw handed him the sheets of the printed play detached from the preface and appendix, with the Third Act omitted and other playing cuts made, and the dialogue at the commencement of the published Act IV (now Act III) altered to account for the presence of the characters in Granada.

Of Adelphi Terrace Robert wrote: "The drawing-room faces South, overlooking the river. On the mantelpiece is carved the defiant legend: '*They say—what say they—let them say.*' The atmosphere is one of austere simplicity. I felt that other people were less civilised, less cultured than the Shaws."

A few days later he spent Sunday with them at Welwyn and was again amazed "at the vital and spiritual force of this astonishing man, so different from any one else I have known . . . his wit and wisdom seem to me to be like the fresh and uncontaminated outlook on life of a baby, miraculously made supremely articulate. . . . I have a foolish self-assertive independence which fights against the idea of hero-worship, yet I was never free from the impression when Shaw was speaking to me that he might at any moment ascend to Heaven like Elisha on a chariot of fire.

"As he walked back with me to the station a yokel called out: 'Hallo, Ginger Whiskers!'—at him. I could have thrashed the boy for his impudence—it seemed like sacrilege—but Shaw prevented me."

Imbued with such worship, Robert went back to produce *Man and Superman* in America. And nothing like the method of rehearsals pursued by this overbearing and desperately earnest young man had ever been seen in New York. He tried out and dismissed thirteen Strakers, four Tavys, history does not record how many Ann Whitefields,[1] or, to

[1]Ann was finally splendidly played by Fay Davis, an established star under contract to Charles Frohman.

take a tiny part, Papa Hector Malones. In the end he went to Frohman and said: "I must have J. D. Beveridge from the London production for the elder Hector Malone." And Frohman, who was inured to every whim and cyclone in the theatre, jumped: "But why transport an *English*-Irishman to play an *American*-Irishman?" he demanded. "Every second actor here is an Irish American; you should be able to cast the part a thousand times over."

"I know," replied Robert miserably. "And I have tried to do so, but I can't. It sounds the height of unreason, but I must have J. D. Beveridge from London."

It stands high to the artistic credit of Charles Frohman that he agreed and spent many hundred pounds in casting a part over which he need only have spent 100 dollars.

No one was certain until after the first night whether they were really settled in their parts—or not. "A highly undesirable method of production," said Frohman, who was shaking in his boots. Undesirable it certainly was, but Robert was too concerned with transmitting the vision in his mind to care about what was tradition, his own or any one else's convenience, or his own growing unpopularity. He was thrusting all he knew, or wished to become, or thought the theatre should represent, into the presentation of this play. That alone was no easy thing to do. In addition, there was the difficulty in those days of having Shaw intelligently acted. (*You Never Can Tell* had been accepted for production and put into rehearsal at the Haymarket Theatre, London, eight years before, only to be abandoned because the *star* players found it 'impossible of comprehension.') Shaw was startling because his viewpoint was directly opposite to existing thought. Robert and a few others in the theatre could understand it, but most actors tried to follow instructions blindly without knowing what the author was getting at. Robert had to 'create' a company of Shavians before *Man and Superman* could be put across. The more so as he meant it to be put across as entertainment.

He, himself, played Tanner in the most unorthodox fashion, hurriedly entering Ramsden's library from a verandah (he

had placed the scene in a Virginian home), throwing half his volcanic replies over his shoulder, so eager was he to be gone, and nervously twisting a straw boater to bits at being detained. Not for a moment did he allow the audience to believe that this eruptive John Tanner was going to remain, consequently they swallowed his speeches greedily, without ever noticing they were speeches. And when he decided to stay because he had something imperative to say, he picked up an arm-chair, bashed it down near where the footlights should have been (he did not use footlights), fell into it and played the scene with his back to the audience. No leading part had ever been handled like that before. People gasped!

And what lines he had to say! He always felt he was parrying with lightning, playing Tanner. Every thought in *Superman* was new in its day, and burst over the audience in a series of bombshells. To take one instance from the viewpoint of 1905, as hit off by Octavius discussing the betrayal of his sister Violet, about to have a baby:

OCTAVIUS : But who is the man? He can make reparation by marrying her; that he shall, or he shall answer for it to me.

RAMSDEN (a solicitor): He shall, Octavius. There you speak like a man.

TANNER: Then you don't think him a scoundrel, after all?

OCTAVIUS: Not a scoundrel? He is a heartless scoundrel.

RAMSDEN: A damned scoundrel.

TANNER: *So we are to marry your sister to a damned scoundrel by way of reforming her character. On my soul, I think you are all mad.*

So do we, we think they're mad, too. But in 1905 those words were nothing less than a thunderclap of good sense to an audience who had never before known anything but the phrase 'make an honest woman of her.'

It was the serious fun with which all the stuffy old notions of morality were exploded, that made *Man and Superman theatre* of the highest order. To-day there are no more stuffy notions to explode, the world has come to think like Shaw,

his truths are no longer bombshells, only the wit of their presentation remains.

But at that time Robert was fulfilling his dream of bringing a wider consciousness of life to the theatre. He wrote: "I tried to infuse into the acting all the mental agility and spiritual sincerity of the author. My efforts were not only for the sake of the money I would make, they sprang from the desire to spread the tidings of a new and exhilarating view of life. I was also determined to vindicate my argument that the public will always support the best."

Support it they did. The first-night audience was hysterical with delight. But as *Superman* had opened early in the season—September 4th—it was not until the week of October 2nd that it broke the record takings of the Hudson Theatre by netting $10,884.75. From that date on, the play took anything between 11,000 dollars to 12,359 dollars and 50 cents a week (equivalent to £2,500) and broke the Ziegfeld Follies takings for that season. This was an unheard-of achievement for a non-musical play, let alone an 'intellectual' play.

"It's sex," gloomed the managers. "What's so sexy in town as that girl chasing Bob?" (Yet Bob had kept on emphasising Anne's chase of Tanner when he read them the play.) "To think you can show stuff as frank as that because it's intellectual," they gloomed again.

But Bob called it 'spreading the religion of the Life Force. Men and women were all of them instruments and experiments of the Life Force, that was the meaning of Thy Will Be Done.' As he had also wisely said: "This play provides entertainment for every grade of intelligence!" An audience could see in it what they would. So, while libraries in New York banned the published book, on the grounds that it would pervert the morals of the young, the public flocked to the Hudson Theatre to be shocked and see the Chase.

CHAPTER V

ROBERT had justified his existence as an actor: he was saved forever, he thought, from the necessity of acting rubbish. His salary had been a 60% share of the profits, so that for many months he drew close on £1,000 a week. The aim he had set himself on the veldt had been realised: at last, and for the first time in his life, he was independent.

The play closed in New York on May 28th, 1906. It was still playing to good business, but the American Summer heat had begun. It re-opened on tour in September, 1906, playing all the usual one-night stands and breaking all the usual records. Times were strenuous, but days were sunlit. Life is good to the conqueror. Robert was thirty, his reputation unique.

He and the company travelled across America in two white railway coaches with *Man and Superman* painted across them in yellow. As most successful theatre companies had their own railway coaches on tour, there was nothing unusual in that. But at the end of these coaches were two white horse-boxes, containing two white horses, one of which he rode every morning. Business was so good that publicity was not needed; even so, to enter a new town every morning riding a white horse was a good way for the arrival of '*Superman*' John Tanner to be announced.

His energy was tremendous, for he would entrain at 1.30 a.m. or thereabouts with the company, and be called at 9 a.m. whether or not they had reached their destination. More often than not they were already there, shunted on to a side-line, and he would ride away on a white horse for three hours. After this, he would call at the theatre to see that all was in order, fulfil any social engagements, play and entrain again that night. And this went on without a break for seven months, as he played a return to some of the larger cities;

the only rest was obtained when the company played a week in some places instead of a night.

At this time he had two Jap servants—two shadows. His life was of necessity simple and well-ordered, but there was an *atmosphere* about it—best described in a story told by Channing Pollock, the author, who called on Bob at Buffalo to read him a play.

Bob was staying in a hotel at Buffalo, where they had happened to play half a week. It was the last night. Channing was pleased because Tanner had given up his rest between the shows—the matinée and evening performance—to hear his play. But no sooner had he started than Bob said: "Excuse me, old man, there's a radiator sizzling in the passage outside, and I can scarcely hear you." The Jap on duty slid to the house phone, complained, and every valet from that floor and other floors was soon at hand trying to screw down the radiator cock.

Channing plunged ahead, while the deputation worked outside. The hissing stopped, then started again. "Excuse me, old man," said Bob, "but this really is impossible." The Jap spoke in a hurried whisper to the manager on the phone, and this time the manager himself came up, accompanied by an 'engineer.'

Once more Channing plunged ahead and made some progress, for all was quiet for a while. Then the hissing broke out with greatly added volume. Channing raised his voice, hoping it would be heard, but Bob rose and went past him like a streak. Channing waited, expecting to hear hot words blister down the house phone, instead he heard a gurgling and a wrenching in the passage, and went out to find Bob pulling the radiator away from the wall. "I wouldn't do that, old man, really—*say*, *Bob*——" he began. But Bob had already torn the radiator from its sockets. There was no more hissing, only a quiet welling of boiling water out of the twisted pipe.

"Now we shall have some peace," said Robert genially, ushering Channing back to the room. He threw himself into the arm-chair, lifting his feet on to another chair. "Go on,

old man," he said, "I'm all attention." And Channing went on. Presently he was obliged to lift his feet on to a chair because the scalding water was oozing into the room. He looked at Bob as if to say: 'Hadn't the management better be told?' But Bob looked back at him and he went on.

At the end of the first Act, the Jap brought his master some snow-boots—the Jap had already donned snow-boots—and in these Bob paddled out to go to the theatre. Channing left the room by an arrangement of chairs used as stepping-stones. The water was four inches high . . . and no one, as far as he knew, had informed the management. He thought he would, and then he didn't.

That night he boarded Bob's special white coach, and as the train steamed out of the station his curiosity burst from him. "Say, Bob," he asked, "*what* happened at the hotel?"

"What did?" asked Bob blankly, serenely unconscious.

"Now, come on, Bob," said Channing, "we know you're a Superman, but if I or any other citizen of the United States had pulled out a radiator and flooded a hotel they would have marched me off between the cops. Did you pay anything?"

"Nothing," said Bob with great dignity, and passed on to Channing's second Act.

But the cops were at the station and round the special coach at Rochester next morning. Robert Loraine was met by a request to pay the hotel at Buffalo $3,000, or else his show could not open. And as *Man and Superman* had to open that night, there was no time for argument. The matter was settled at $2,000, and Robert rode away on his white horse.

Channing left, feeling that the part of John Tanner was having a heady influence on Bob. But had Robert been penniless he would have done just the same; if he wanted a noise to stop, it had to stop, and that was the end of it. Yet it was was only over trifles that he was hasty and intolerant. In a crisis nothing could fluster his patience or break down his iron self-control. It was then that he was indomitable in the true sense of the word. And those who knew him knew this, and were often surprised by his 'other-man' childishness. . . .

In May, 1907, he returned to London and played John

Tanner in his own fashion with the *Man and Superman* London Company at the Court Theatre.[1] Shaw thought his Tanner† perfection throughout the first half, whilst Tanner was victorious and irresistible. But when Ann's turn came and Tanner went down to defeat and despair at her hands—this part had been performed to Shaw's complete satisfaction by Harley Granville-Barker—Robert simply would not give in†. Shaw wanted an emphasis on the moment when Tanner, exhausted by pressure from the Life Force, is at the woman's mercy, and cries: "Let it (the Life Force) kill us." "*Do let us feel you are beaten*," begged Shaw.

"But not by the woman . . ." countered Robert. "By my own strength or weakness, by the Life Force within me, yes But not by the woman."

Nothing would induce him to admit it was the woman; and Shaw, perceiving he was up against some deep personal bias, and that the stage business which Granville-Barker made so tragic only made Robert sulky and furious, finally let him have his own way, exclaiming: "Oh, if I could only have Loraine for the first half and Granville-Barker for the second, what a Tanner that would be." But Robert would never be beaten by a woman again, after Julie. Ann never had a chance with him.

"Let us give them *Don Juan in Hell*," was the next cry; and this portion of *Man and Superman* was given for matinées at the Court, while *The Man of Destiny* was played in the evenings by Irene Vanbrugh and Dion Boucicault, to whose management Shaw abandoned it, being entirely pre-occupied with *Don Juan in Hell.*

†Nobody nowadays can form the least conception of what a desperate adventure it was in those days to present such stuff to a theatrical audience in London. Not for many years afterwards was *Man and Superman* played in its entirety at perfor-

†Mr. Shaw has interpolated between†.

[1] Criticism of that time: "He *was* John Tanner. In every movement, turn, gesture and thought he was the living man. He did not deliver his long speeches of dialectical fireworks as though he had committed them to memory. He said them on the spur of the moment. They were all impromptu! It was the performance of a superman; a man almost too much alive, who might easily become too manly, too much of a good thing."

mances lasting nearly three times as long as the fashionable comedies of the *fin de siècle*. Neither Robert nor any one else dreamed that such a thing would ever be possible; and as a matter of fact he never played Tanner and Don Juan[1] on the same evening; but he was the first to show that he could be equally superb in both parts†.

Shaw annotated *Don Juan*, the dream in the third act of *Superman*, like a symphony for Robert. The margin in the book twinkled with crotchets, crescendoes and minims; with G clefs, F clefs, and pianissimos; and Robert, who did not know how to read music, learned how to do so by this. Only once did Shaw burst into language in the margin: "Always say Alas! with expression," he interjects in his thin high-pointed writing. "To-day it sounded chucked in to please me." This was at a point where Robert, fearing a speech might become too symphonic, had dropped into the colloquial.

†*Don Juan in Hell* had an orchestral accompaniment adapted from Mozart, Gounod, and Handel; and the costumes (Robert hated his) made the most wonderful picture in the black void, and established Charles Ricketts as a master of stage pictorialism. As a feat of memory alone Robert's performance was a prodigy.†

Shaw was happy. Robert was happy. To celebrate happiness, Shaw took Robert and Granville-Barker up in a balloon. He also took Mrs. Shaw's sister, Mrs. Cholmondely, who had a fancy for the adventure. Mrs. Shaw was kept in the dark until the party returned safely.

"Ascending from Wandsworth Gas Works," says Robert's diary, "we were soon floating above the clouds at about 9,000 feet, exhilarated but somewhat awed by our first experience of altitude. After about forty minutes' drifting, very pleasant and seraphic with nothing happening, except that Shaw would peer through a hole in the boarding at his feet

[1]Of Loraine as Don Juan, William Archer, critic, said: "A really immense achievement." The *Daily Telegraph*: "Anything better than Mr. Loraine's performance we have never seen." Since then *Man and Superman* has been played in its entirety—at one stretch, just as it is written—notably by Mr. Esmé Percy in Repertory. But during the 'Don Juan in Hell' Act, Mr. Percy had the stage so arranged that he could, if necessary, have recourse to the book.

†Mr. Shaw has interpolated between†.

which made him feel rather sick, we discussed landing. We wondered what our reception would be on coming down in somebody's garden. I thought the people would be rather interested to receive visitors from the air, and especially flattered when they discovered Shaw's identity. "Don't be so certain," said Shaw. "They may think my works detestable." Mr. Spencer, the aeronaut, assured us that no matter where we landed or who we might be, we should be overwhelmed by the warmth of our welcome owing to the unusual nature of our arrival.

"In due course we came down on a field near Cobham Common, and after assisting to deflate the balloon, we turned to find ourselves surrounded by people who seemed to have appeared from nowhere. We were just going to tell them all about it, when a purple-faced individual came rushing towards us waving a shooting-stick. This he had the grace to hide when he saw Mrs. Cholmondely, but he was suffocating with fury, and the welcome he gave us was a curt direction as to the quickest way off his property."

In July, 1907, Robert drove a little Maxwell two-seater car, which he had brought over from New York, down to Mevagissey. Here the Shaws had taken a house for the summer and invited him to spend it with them. He notes—the only note—"Shaw is in the wildest high spirits, as light-hearted as a schoolboy. We drive the little Maxwell round the lovely countryside—she mounts the hills splendidly—and take hundreds of snapshots. Shaw is a very scientific photographer and gets wonderful results. I have secured some good photographs by simply pointing the Kodak and pressing the lever; whenever I try his methods of measuring light with litmus paper, the results are appalling."

In this way the sunlit days sped on with never a cloud in the sky. From time to time he wondered what play he should do next; managers were wooing him, but every play he read seemed so tame after *Man and Superman* that he merely slipped over to Paris to get right away from the theatre and enjoy the £40,000 he had made as John Tanner. He meant to think out what he should do with life now that he had money. "I

took courage," he says, "and decided to survey my prospects and consider turning to some other form of activity, where I would not be dependent on the uncertain factor of finding plays that would appeal to the public." But before Robert had time to decide on any other form of activity, over came an invitation to play in *Arms and the Man* on splendid terms at the Savoy.

Back he went to five months' rollicking care-free success—a success that inevitably identified him with Shaw, so that people dubbed him as being strange, contradictory and highly controversial. Perhaps he was. He was proud when they said he was Shavian; contact with Shaw had made life more exciting, doubled his own dynamic energies, and sent him forging ahead into new spheres of thought. Gone were the days of his early youth: the days of his manhood were full of promise.

He followed Bluntschli in *Arms and the Man* with St. John Hotchkiss in *Getting Married* at the Haymarket, both under the Vedrenne-Barker management.

"Wherever I go," he wrote at this time, "there exists the most extraordinary misconception of Shaw's work and character. 'Brilliance' is universally conceded to him; but buffoonery, clowning, moral laxity and, above all, *insincerity*, are charged against him. He is accused of having a bad influence on youth; like Stockman, he is an enemy of the people because he reports the shocking state of the local drains, and clamours for reformation. I wonder when the world will discover that, so far from being insincere, he is a fanatically serious writer; that his cynicism is the view of a realist, his buffoonery the exuberance of high spirits; and that instead of moral laxity, he practises a code of such high honour that few can attempt to approach it."

And again: "When we play *Arms and the Man* half the house is amused, and half the house is furious; but all the house is incredulous of one point—a soldier eating chocolate. Yet what else did we survive on in the Boer War, and what else did Queen Victoria send as the most suitable Christmas Gift to her soldiers in the field in 1900? That was a good

touch of prophecy; the play was first produced in 1894! St. John Hotchkiss[1] in *Getting Married* is typical of the officers I served under and detested in the Boer War."

Summer, 1908, found the Shaws at Llanbedr in Wales, whither they invited Robert. He went with his car; the Shaws had a car; and G.B.S. had his bicycle. But these were all forsaken, as the roads were bad, and the two men went for long tramps in the hills, with Shaw talking marvellously on every subject . . . why the Arabic system of enumeration came to be adopted; the difficulty of applying any system of eugenics to the productions of a race of supermen; Robert's view that the Life Force—or mutual attraction—was probably the best director eugenically . . . and so on, and so on, and so on. To hear Shaw talk on these occasions was, according to Robert, to be given a correct focus on the mainsprings of life, as surprising and enthralling as that to be obtained through a pair of binoculars over an exciting but hitherto poorly-perceived country.

The Shaws rose early and went to bed early. They were rarely up later than 10 p.m. After dinner at 7 p.m. they went into a quiet sitting-room, stripped of all distracting prints and ornaments, where Mrs. Shaw read philosophy on one side, while Shaw sat in his corner reading or writing. Between them somewhere sat Robert, also reading. The atmosphere at these times was rarefied and serene; but on walks or at meals—deliciously-cooked vegetarian meals—it was exuberant and unforgettably witty. No hostess was so finely poised or better able to confer ease than Mrs. Shaw—the possessor of a very soft voice, keen humour, and a view of her own—no host as courtly as G. B. S. If the disciple was ready to accompany G. B. S. on his early-morning walks, the disciple went. But if the disciple forgot himself as a guest and slept, then the guest slept on till he wakened. Every one did as they pleased and yet seemed to foregather at 10.30 a.m., when there was always a bathe. "Once," says Robert, "there had

[1]Note: St. John Hotchkiss fought many duels to prove his courage, which he thought might be held in doubt ever since he had refused to attack when ordered, on the grounds that his commanding officer was not a gentleman.

been a great storm in the night and the sea was still so rough when we arrived for our swim, we decided to go for a walk instead.

"Another look at the curling waves, however, made G. B. S. think the combers so inviting that we nipped out of our clothes and were soon diving under the breakers with glee. We rolled for a while in the surf. Then Shaw wanted to try and swim out. After a good deal of buffeting we managed to get past the inshore line of waves to steadier water farther out. Shaw went on and on. I followed. After a while we turned towards the land again, and were amazed to find we were far farther out than we had ever thought possible. What was more alarming still, we soon realised that we were being carried away by an irresistible current set up by the tide that had just turned.

"Purposefully, side by side, we struck out for the shore. I became seriously concerned about Shaw's safety. This was stupid, because he is a better swimmer than I, his lean physique has more endurance; and it was absurd for me to think of helping him; I should only have been an encumbrance. Still, I felt that at all costs he must be saved. It would have been a disaster for the world to lose him. As I struggled, I thought fantastically that Shaw would be handicapped by the weight of his brain.

"Then, shortness of breath and desperation at the distance still had to be swum, told me I was quite incapable of rendering assistance. My lungs were going from distress to agony, and as I despaired of reaching land, I tried to get it over and drown. After each attempt to sink I found myself automatically striking out again to save my life. In one of these attempts to cease swimming and go under—floating was out of the question in that foaming water—my foot struck a jagged end of rock. The sharp pain and sensation of something solid brought fresh hope and stimulated me to a last effort. Miraculously I found myself standing on solid ground in the middle of the sea, up to my knees in water. We had struck a sandbank or possibly an old causeway. I staggered ashore and flopped on to the sand gasping. Shaw came to land side by side with me.

"We lay gasping for some time. When we recovered our breath, Shaw said very coolly: "That was a near thing," and went off to fetch his sandshoes, which were drying where our swim began. When he came back I asked him whether visions of his past life had come before him, as they say the drowning have them. He shook his head. "Nor I——" I said. "Did you think of God, or Hell, or Heaven?"

†"No," said Shaw. "A man does not think of fairy tales within two minutes of certain death. I thought of nothing but pressing practical things. First I wanted to tell you not to try to swim to shore, as it was no use and the effort would exhaust you. The thing to do was to let the sea take you where it liked and keep afloat as long as possible. But the noise of the waves was too loud and you were too far away. Then I saw that we were being carried along the shore; and I considered whether the people there could help us if we sang out. But there were no fishermen there: only trippers who would have upset a boat if they had tried to launch it. Then I thought of Charlotte getting the news that I was drowned, and of how I had not altered my will and how she would never be able to understand my arrangements with my translators. Then I saw you were having a hard time when the big waves came, and thought of what a pity it was that you should be lost in the strength of your youth with the world before you, and that I didn't matter, as I had shot my bolt and done my work. Then I asked myself how many more strokes I could swim before the effort became too great, and I had rather drown than try any more. Then my foot struck a stone, and instead of saying, 'Thank God!' I said, 'Damn!' Then came a really awful moment. When I got on my legs you had vanished. It was my clear duty to dive after you and rescue you. I could not go home without you and say I had left you to drown. And then came the frightful humiliation of realising that I was utterly incapable of swimming another stroke. I had reached my limit. And then I found that you were standing close behind me. But, by Gad, it took the conceit out of me."†

†Mr. Shaw has interpolated between†.

Sidney Webb was among the Shaws' most frequent visitors. Whenever he came, he and Robert sat in wicker chairs on the terrace, smoking, while Shaw paced up and down launching fresh campaigns for Fabianism. Wonderful it was to listen to him and be catapulted into worlds of new thought; to be sucked mentally into vortexes and picked up and hurled into space by his arguments; to disintegrate and re-assemble, crawl humbly in the wake of his reasoning and be pulverised afresh. Facts, hard facts, were always the essence of Shaw's driving force. Facts, presented with Shavian wit, white-hot sincerity, mastery and logic.

And Shaw, sensing the priest in Robert, would have turned his disciple into a good Fabian, would have given him a Fabian outlet for his mind and money. But every man must follow his own call, and, deeply as Robert was swayed by Shaw, there was not enough flamboyance about the Fabian adventure to suit him. Besides, he was already occupied with a new vision. No man, no doctrine, no pursuit could ever dominate Robert long. Change was the urge; and, in his rapid making and unmaking, a fresh Heaven was opening for him, one—this time—that cut straight into the sky.

PART TWO

Sic Itur ad Astra

As Young Marlow—bashful and tongue-tied—meeting Kate Hardcastle.
She Stoops to Conquer, Haymarket Theatre, 1909.

CHAPTER VI

Now, for a while, this Chronicle must take the form of a Tale from *Three Musketeers*, as events unroll and are told either by Robert, in the happy role of pioneer flying-man; by Jules Vedrines, his mechanic, destined to become one of the most famous French aviators; or by George Smart, his devoted friend, ex-soldier and would-be playwright.

Smart it was who wrote most of his impressions in a daily journal in which, however, he failed to give himself credit for the part he played. Many of the flights could never have taken place but for Smart. It was his unfailing industry and resource in the Loraine cause that made it possible for Robert to gain the Overseas Flying Records for 1910. For Robert could only snatch at Aviation. He had continually to be acting, rehearsing and attending to theatre business between flights. His outstanding success as Charles Surface[1] in Tree's all-star cast for *The School for Scandal* at His Majesty's Theatre, had brought him into greater prominence even than his acting of the Shaw plays. So, although his whole heart was in aviation, it was left to Smart to organise his flying.

And this little man who could bring nothing to pass for himself, brought much to pass for Robert.

His whole life and character was a direct antithesis to Robert's—Smart had been thrust into the army, young, from a line of soldiers, and had resigned his commission to become a writer. Robert, with acting in his blood, had set out to earn his living as an artist and had played truant at his first chance to become a soldier; Robert was the man of action, Smart the dreamer—nevertheless, Smart brought much to pass for Robert.

[1]Loraine was unanimously declared "the hit of the evening," and "his acting stands out by itself." This was partly due to his "ultra-gorgeous appearance in blue hose," and to his exit from the screen scene, which was "memorable." The traditional Charles had always retired from the scene in fits of loud laughter over Sir Peter's discomfiture: "Robert Loraine walked slowly and gravely from the room, to the immense dramatic heightening of the situation."

To study them closer, as for a time they were inseparable: Robert filled the eye, Smart never caught it; Robert always pushed the head-gear he was wearing well back from his forehead, whereas Smart had his cap, or more frequently an old tweed bonnet, pulled down over his eyes; Smart never could steer his boat into midstream, Robert was always ahead where the current was swiftest; so, although Smart started out with him inclined to criticise—since he had the better judgment and finer perception of the two in many ways—in the end he suborned himself utterly, as *Robert was always first with the Idea.* And by effacing himself completely and forgetting all about his novel and play-writing during the weeks that unloosed flying over England, Smart came nearer to tasting success and fulfilment without ever being noticed than he came in his life. He was one of the thousands swept up into the service of a great idea.

"It all arose, as far as I came into it," says he, "from one of Robert's eccentricities. Robert being a person of artistic temperament and renown is much given to inexplicable and suddenly conceived action, which ordinary people regard as an eccentricity.

"It began in the July of 1909, on a fine morning. I had just eaten my breakfast roll and butter and was cudgelling my brains over my morning's work—the love-affairs of Jamie and Jenny—when the abrupt entrance of Loraine dragged my mind back from its desperate gropings. I rubbed my eyes. There he stood, clothed, shaved and full of some suppressed excitement at half-past nine in the morning; an hour with which he has scarcely a bowing acquaintance. Also he was looking at me in an intense queer way, which made me draw my dressing-gown more closely around me to hide my shabby pyjamas.

"Robert is successful and rich, which invariably makes me feel rather envious when I meet him. He now strode across the room, fixing me firmly with his eyes and blurted it out:

'"I'm going to fly," he snapped.

'"I beg your pardon?" I asked.

'"I've made up my mind to *fly*," he repeated.

'"Yes—yes—yes—quite," I said soothingly.

'"But you don't understand," he said petulantly. "I'm going to buy an *aeroplane* at once."

"Then I grasped it, and began to speak words of admiration and encouragement. The Wright brothers, Blériot, Hubert Latham, Henry Farman—were trying to fly over in France.

"The Wright brothers' machines had been catapulted into the air, but Henry Farman had risen from the ground on his own power—Robert informed me—flown, and actually *turned* his machine round in the air and landed back on the spot from which he had taken off!

"Robert had seen Farman do it at Issy-les Moulineaux, as far back as January, 1908. The enthusiasm had been tremendous! Farman had been about six feet off the ground, and Robert had rushed round after the flight and ordered a Voisin aeroplane there and then. That was the same machine as Farman's. It was to have been delivered in ten months' time, but had never arrived.

"And all that was already eighteen months ago. Eighteen months—imagine it! The delay! He threw back his head and challenged the ceiling. I waited for what was coming.

"*Now* he was going round the English firms—not a long journey, as there were only two of them—then he would go to France. He would see everything, learn everything, and finally buy the very best and latest in aeroplanes. The very best and latest is usually almost good enough for Bob.

"I listened in wonder because flying was regarded in England with as much credulity as a sea-serpent.

'"What about your work?" I expostulated.

'"Oh, that's all right," he answered carelessly.

"I pointed out to him that he had arrived at that critical position in his profession, from which another two years of luck and energetic work would land him right in the foremost rank. That at the moment he was not in the first rank, and he was not to let himself be flattered into imagining that he was, as only by sticking to it like a leech would he have the slightest chance of becoming leader of the English stage. But I was grieved to see he was not listening.

"Robert's is a complex character, much too complex to explain all at once, and one of his qualities is the ability absolutely to concentrate on the matter of the moment.

"He was now obviously drunk with his new idea, and I could see he could talk, think, or dream of nothing else for the time being. Whether it would last, it was impossible to say. The moods chase each other across his mind like clouds over a plain in windy weather. Each mood in turn absorbs him completely. He surrenders his being to the interest of the moment, as if it were to an anaesthetic, and one never knows how he will come to, or what he will remember when the fumes have passed away.

"I remonstrated with him from the outset, because if anything ever happens to him, I wish to feel clear of all responsibility. Not that any one could be held responsible for the meteoric flashings and lightning impulses which represent the trivial round and common task of Robert's daily life, least of all Robert himself. The man seems to be driven by some invisible, inexplicable force.

"And after he had duly ignored my protests, he stood on my faded hearthrug and poured out his opinions on the possibilities of flying. Briefly, these comprised the displacement of cabs, motor-cars, two-penny tubes, railways, armies, navies and the mercantile marine of the world. His own ambitions commenced, as far as I can remember, with a flight from London to New York.

"It now transpired that one of his earliest recollections was of walking on a sea-front and watching the gulls—he thinks he was about five at the time—and deciding he would have to transfer the principles of flight as shown by these birds to a machine he would fly himself.

"I told him this sounded very precocious. He replied that he was brighter in intelligence then, than he had ever been since.

"These dreams of his were pushed into the background as he grew older and had to make his way in the world. But they had returned very strongly as soon as he was free from the pre-occupation of making a living; and he was now deter-

mined to turn his serious attention to solving the problem of flying. He had been up once or twice in a balloon, I understood. But balloons were unsatisfactory, they drifted; and it should be possible for man's flight to be directed.

"Having said this, he burst out of my flat as abruptly as he had entered it, leaving me to collect my scattered wits as best I could in the hope of converting them into a guinea's worth of marketable fiction.

"The remainder of Summer, 1909, I spent wandering about Scotland with a fishing-rod and a fountain-pen. Robert, being essentially a product of modernity, never writes long chatty letters, but sometimes communicates with his friends by telegram. Thus it was I learned before the rest of my remote little part of the world that Blériot had succeeded in crossing the Channel in an aeroplane; and, incidentally, that Robert was prosecuting the new cause at Sangatte."

To Sangatte Robert had gone to be with Blériot and Latham, who were both waiting for a calm to fly the Channel. Latham had tried to do this on July 19th, but had fallen into the sea just off Folkestone. His machine was an Antoinette, made by Gastambide and Levasseur.

"Blériot has the better machine, I think," says an entry in Robert's diary on July 22nd. "It is designed and made by himself. He has improvements in mind and, according to the designs he outlined, I contracted with him to-day to make me an aeroplane more powerful than his present machine, capable of carrying two people instead of one, and petrol for a journey far beyond the capacity of any machine to date.

"I am full of hopes.

"We are all on fire with the idea of advancing aviation. The days are spent discussing problems of balance and speed, and the trussing of wings and their proportion in relation to the tail. Every now and again when the weather settles a match is lit and held out in the open. If the flame flickers it is not considered calm enough to fly, and our watch is resumed beside either the Blériot or the Antoinette. Rather an intolerable condition of things, as Blériot and Latham look at each other like fighting cats. At the very first hint of a calm, one

or other of them will be off. The vigil has been kept for four days, it is very exciting."

On the morning of July 25th, Blériot achieved his epoch-making cross-Channel flight.

"He started at dawn," says Robert. "I relieved him of his crutches when *he was lifted into the machine.* His feet were burned two days ago in an accident, and the paradox of a man unable to walk essaying this new mode of transit struck me as being very dramatic.

"We watched him disappear in the haze and then drove to the abandoned Channel Tunnel building at Sangatte, where a wireless receiver had been set up. After an anxious period of waiting we heard news of his landing, and among the crowd who heard it was Hubert Latham.

"Poor Latham's mortification at his rival's victory was very natural, and he dashed straight back to his beautiful Antoinette with the intention of starting for the English coast. But Gastambide, the owner of the machine, forbade him to attempt it. Latham pleaded to be allowed to make a test flight, but even this was not allowed. I walked back with him to the little hotel at Sangatte, where he sat down on his bed and cried like a child."

After this Robert returned to London to fulfil theatrical engagements and wait for Blériot to deliver the machine he had ordered. But his demands had been too exacting, and Blériot could not find an engine powerful enough to fulfil the specifications. Finally, he asked Robert to come over and see the latest machines that were being manufactured, and to learn to fly at his school at Pau. Over went Robert in April, 1910, and the note in his diary says:

"The school is equipped with some half-dozen machines of a similar type to the one on which Blériot flew the Channel; i.e., a small single-seater monoplane[1], with an air-cooled, three-cylinder radial Anzani engine, giving approximately 25 horse-power.

"The pupil is pitched into the seat and briefly shown how to work the controls, and the use of the throttle and switch.

[1]This, of course, allowed of no dual control or clear instruction.

His machine is then given a push and he is turned loose with orders to drive about on his wheels till he can steer her straight. In order that he shall not blunder inadvertently into the air, the central lever—otherwise the *cloche*, or joy-stick—is tied well forward. So he rushes round like a decapitated chicken, until he flops sideways with one wing-tip broken; which is precisely what happened to me this morning."

Soon, however, Robert acquired the knack of keeping his plane straight, and steered her smartly up and down the aerodrome, round and round, on the ground, with her tail up, all purposeful and ready to jump into the air but for the cloche being tied in a forward position. He wanted to *fly*, but was told it was only after weeks of ground practice that the restraining cord was removed and the budding aviator allowed to make a hop; three weeks later he would be given sufficient petrol for a flight round the aerodrome. Naturally Robert found this procedure somewhat leisurely for his needs, as he had only six days to spare from London where he was acting, and he was determined to fly, before he went back.

"So, on the third day I stopped the machine in the seclusion of a distant part of the aerodrome and unknotted the cord that held the *cloche* forward," says his diary. "Now, I was free, or so I thought. I opened the throttle and raced along the ground till I judged my speed to be sufficient, then I pulled back the *cloche* good and hard. She should have risen—but she did not. I tried again—but she would not leave the ground. I was greatly puzzled. Then it occurred to me that the engine might lack power, and next day I was at the school before dawn to bribe the mechanic in charge to let me have a less used-up engine for my practice. In this I was successful.

" Again I went to the far corner of the field and untied the *cloche* and opened the throttle all out, to find that the new engine gave me much more power. Astonishingly more power. So, as soon as I had full speed on, I pulled back the *cloche* with great *determination* and we leapt into the air! At last I was flying! I, myself, alone; I was fulfilling an instinct so strong that it easily over-rode any other instinct of self-preservation.

"I looked at the ground and felt like a conqueror. I looked at the sky and wanted more. More of this exaltation. Altitude. Height, height. Nothing simpler. I pulled back the *cloche*. The machine leapt higher, so did my heart, higher still—then—paff!—I came to earth, having stalled and crashed.

"As I picked myself out of the dèbris, somewhat dazed by a gash on the forehead, I realised I must cultivate a lighter hand on the joy-stick. All the same, I was very happy.

"It was not surprising that the Blériot School declined to provide me with another machine when I came to fly again next day, as they had contracted to bear the cost of all damage. So, after having my forehead stitched up I returned to London.

"I decided it would be a long while before Blériot could supply me with the kind of aeroplane I really wanted, one that would permit of long cross-country flights. So, next time I was free to leave London and pursue investigations, I called on Henry Farman at Mourmelons, and asked for a racing-machine similar to the one he had supplied to Paulhan. Paulhan was the holder of the then long distance record. Again I was met with the story from Farman that he could not undertake to deliver any order within twelve months. But I had already been round the sheds and spotted the machine I wanted—a biplane fitted with a six cylinder Gnome engine capable of giving 50 horse-power—and I led him by the arm to the shed. Farman said that *that* plane was sold and merely waiting for the owner to take delivery. However, there are always ways and means of arranging these matters, and after half an hour the machine was mine. (Note: modest cost, £7,000.)

"I proceeded to learn to fly the Farman plane on other machines at Mourmelons; and take my pilot's certificate without risking damage to my own beautiful new racer."[1]

"Ah, name of a devil, what a man!" ejaculates Vedrines, chief mechanic at the Farman school, in his Memoirs. "This Loraine must never be kept waiting. Does he arrive at the aerodrome. Quickly the chief pilot must be at his disposal,

[1]1000 horse-power is the least that is usual in a *racer* to-day. This one had 50, but was a super-machine in its time.

As Young Marlow—the importunate, in his true colours—with the maid.
She Stoops to Conquer, Haymarket Theatre, 1909.

quickly the machine must be out and tuned, he, himself, must be in the seat, and myself be throwing a last quick look over the wires and controls. Then away Loraine goes, quickly away, away, and double-quick down he crashes.

"After he crashes, and he crashes every day—and still remains alive to crash—he walks back to the hangars, humming a little tune, as if what has just happened to him is the most natural thing in the world, instead of being the result of sheer clumsiness. He waves a casual hand to the chief pilot and myself, who are stamping there, so enraged are we at the breaking-up of another machine, and says with complete sang-froid, '*A demain. A demain.*' And it conveys nothing to him that the chief pilot and I have nothing to say."

At another point in Vedrines' *Memoirs*, he says: "Loraine had thrown himself into aviation out of sheer love of flying. He was not an inventor, nor a designer, nor even a mathematician, nor a mechanic. His profession had no relation to his hobby. Indeed, you would have to be English to take up two such opposite careers and follow them simultaneously, for Loraine was an actor. And who can imagine Guitry, Monet Sully, or Jean Bloch leaving the stage, their parts and make-up to pilot an aeroplane.

"Nor did Loraine completely lose the stamp of his profession on the aerodrome. The artist in him often replaced the aviator, when the latter was insecurely balanced between Heaven and earth. Loraine was brave, cool, and possessed of a remarkable decision, but he had the soul of a poet; and a poet does not make a reliable pilot. So, even though Loraine was the most enterprising pilot I have ever known, he was never a good one. Only his unfailing presence of mind saved him from paying the extreme penalty in his misadventures, and oh! what a dose he gave me of continual foolhardiness. I can tell you I had no rest-cure when I became mechanic to that lunatic-hero. Was he lunatic or hero? Well, he was both in turn, and often both at once. But he had great ideas; always, *big ideas*; and that is what counts in our little Science of Aviation."

Later, he says: "Ah, how well I knew that Loraine was destined to become the most sensational, if not the most

successful of British Air Pioneers; and to my mind, the most courageous."

Meanwhile, long before these eulogies were won, Robert was busy cracking up every biplane at the Farman School and procuring his Pilot's certificate in record time. (The aspirant for a pilot's certificate had to make two figures of eight, and three landings within twenty yards of a mark; rise to 400 feet, cut off his engine at 100 feet, and land within twenty yards of the mark. All this Robert did on June 21st, 1910, when he flew for and obtained his *brevet*.) Now, at last, he was a full-fledged pilot and had the machine of his dreams, the plane he had been negotiating for over 2½ years. He engaged Vedrines as nurse, or mechanic to the machine, at a salary of £150 a month and all expenses paid. Then he had his Farman Racer dismantled and packed in wooden cases, addressed to Beaulieu, New Forest, England. Here it was that Drexel and McArdle had roughed out an aerodrome, and here it was that Robert intended to practise in readiness for the Bournemouth Meeting, to be held between July 11th and 16th—England's First International Aviation Week.

He had entered as competitor in all the Flying Events, against such names as Morane, Grahame-White—one of the most dexterous flyers—Charles Rolls—who was to cross the Channel both ways in a non-stop Flight—and Audemars, who had designed an entirely fresh type of aeroplane. In fact, he, a newcomer, had not hesitated to pit himself against all the 'lights.'

Sickening mishaps prevented his preparedness. Vedrines insulted a policeman on landing in England, and was arrested. There were no hangars on the Beaulieu aerodrome, and a week went by whilst one was built, before the Farman could be unpacked and assembled. AND DELAY 3. *Robert insisted on flying in bad weather.* Now, as every one knew, this was a crazy thing to do. There had to be a calm before you could fly. But Robert, forsooth, meant to show otherwise. It was idiotic. Harsh words were exchanged on the subject between him and Vedrines who had strong ideas about 'the total undesirability of damaging *l'appareil*.'

Robert, on the contrary, had no qualms about breaking up the Farman; if, in doing so, he could advance aviation.

"I was very anxious," he states, "to disprove the contention of those who argued that flying could never be a practical means of transport if you had to wait for perfect weather, and were unable to proceed on a rainy, gusty day. *I found that flying in gusty winds was more alarming than dangerous; and that rain made flying uncomfortable but, not, as was believed at the time, impossible.*"

But, of course, he always ended up with forced landings and left the machine for Vedrines to repair 'in little bits'; after which there were endless disputes, pleadings, and arguments. Arguments and haranguings . . . Vedrines tried to strike bargains, in his fight for the control of the machine. Robert would have no bargain. Vedrines had a temperament. Robert had a temperament. Also, he was *le patron.* For all his arbitrariness, however, he was at the mercy of his mechanic; a mechanic who, when he was upset, burst into tears. "*C'est que j'ai affreusement mal la nostalgie,*" Vedrines would sob. Or else it was his favourite expression: "*Dieu, que j'ai le mal du pays.*"

Came the great day before the momentous Bournemouth Meeting. Robert wished to fly to the Meeting, but the machine was still being repaired from the previous day's damage. *And* certain screws could not be found. The village had none in the length required. It meant sending to London. Before doing this, Robert made one last tour of the village himself, and came back with the screws. "But where did you find them?" asked Vedrines. "I went to every shop——"

"But not to the Undertaker's," said Robert. "These are coffin screws."

"*Dieu de mes pères,* I will not use them," cried Vedrines, horrified at the omen.

"Don't be absurd," said Robert impatiently. "Do you want the aeroplane to be my coffin without the screws?"

In went the screws and Vedrines was left dancing with anguish as Robert sailed away into the sky: 'What was any mechanic to do with a patron who flew in the *sal temps* (dirty weather) with coffin screws?' he asked. And as there was no

one to answer him, he broke down and had *gravement le mal du pays.*

That evening Vedrines took a long ride in a farm-cart to a meadow between streams, where Robert sat in a hedge, perched on the remaining spar of the machine, smoking endless cigarettes until some one should find him. He had had a break-down.

"Aha," said Vedrines, when he caught sight of the crumpled biplane. "Oh, là, là, it is now all over with the apparatus except to make a bon-fire." But Robert thought differently. He always did.

Away in Bournemouth, at Southbourne Aerodrome, George Smart was waiting. Robert had told him to be 'in waiting,' and had engaged rooms for him at the hotel, rooms which George Smart could never have afforded to engage. And George was grateful and anxious to render service. Up he went at an early hour to the Aerodrome, with his little moustache quivering, as might a terrier's, expecting he knew not what: his straw boater—a concession to dressiness—tilted steeply over his eyes which, however, missed nothing; and there he waited. He wrote:

"The year has been a remarkable one in the annals of Aviation. It is now impossible to take up a newspaper without reading of some fresh marvel. The London-Manchester Flight, so generally jeered at when the prize was offered, is now an accomplished fact. And I, like the rest of the world, have been vaguely aware that a great movement is in progress.

"But my one contact with it all is Robert, who possesses an aeroplane somewhere in England, and is proposing to make a dramatic, if disguised, entry into a most dramatic sphere . . ."

(Note: Robert was flying under the pseudonym of 'Jones.' Loraine was his stage name, and he did not wish his flying to be confounded with any theatrical publicity stunt. He was flying because he wished to advance aviation; and Jones was as commonplace a name as any he could find. All the same, the Press very soon discovered that Jones was Loraine: and this attempt to hide his identity resulted in at least three times as much publicity.)

"I had never been to a Flying Meeting before," says Smart, "and as I walked into the Bournemouth Aerodrome, I was chiefly impressed with the extraordinary dilatoriness and expense of it all. There were acres of enclosures, huge grand stands, and miles of wooden palisading along the edge of the course.

"At one end some dozen hangars had been erected of wood and canvas. Each of these bore the name of the Aviator and the flag of his country above it. The course was marked by four pylons, which looked like black and white lighthouses. In the centre, opposite the stands, was the Judges' Box, a sumptuous building with enough glass in it to construct a good-sized conservatory, and flagstaffed like a coastguard station.

"I found Robert's hangar, but it was empty. Nor were there any signs of life about it. A number of machines had arrived, the place was alive with mechanics, newspaper reporters, and officials with coloured bands round their arms. I wandered about and then sat down, regarding the heavens expectantly. Nothing came. But thus I remained for hours, regarding the dome of Heaven expectantly. At last, when work had ceased everywhere, and the great Arena had become altogether too dismal to stay in, I took a penny tram back to the hotel.

"At the hotel there was no news of Robert. I dined in solitary state among a crowd of people who were, I gathered, the leaders of the Aviation movement, and afterwards sat in the lounge watching the front door. I don't know what I expected to happen, for Robert is always unpredictable.

"I should not have been vastly surprised if he had suddenly flown into the lounge through the window, upsetting the coffee and liquours of the beautifully-dressed gathering.

"As usual, he was dramatic. At half-past eleven he drove up, dirty and unshaved, looking unspeakably knocked about, in a thick knickerbocker suit, in a motor car. He was grim and determined, so I immediately understood something had gone wrong. He was also very hungry and demanded food.

"Whilst he ate, I gathered more or less what had happened. He had set off, intending to fly to Bournemouth. Other aviators were quite content to bring their machines along in

the ordinary way, neatly packed up in wooden cases. Not so Robert. He must demonstrate the practicability of aeroplanes, and his own pre-eminence as an aviator at one and the same time. *And that time must be a day before the real Flying Week commenced.*

"Unfortunately he had smashed badly on the way, and it was highly probable that it would be impossible to repair the damage in time for him to fly at the Meeting at all.

"Robert, however, is at his finest, when everything goes wrong. He clenches his teeth and refuses to concede to the obvious. We worked far into the night planning transport and the hiring of mechanics and carpenters and flares; and, in general, arranging to turn night into day until the repairs should be completed. A heart-breaking job.

"Next morning, we awoke to discover that McArdle, a rival, had not only stolen Robert's beautiful idea, but had succeeded in carrying it out. For McArdle had arrived at the Aerodrome, having flown half-way across Hampshire with a Gladstone bag containing pyjamas and a toothbrush.

"We were very silent at breakfast and very gloomy, but most emphatically resolute.

"*Note*: Robert, I begin to discover, cannot bear to be cast for any other role than that of the leading star."

. . . . . .

A procession of six carts preceded by two horses each brought Robert's Farman biplane in small, large and many-shaped packing-cases to Southbourne Aerodrome.

When opened, these cases revealed tangled wires, ragged strips of canvas, bits of engine, screws, valveheads and innumerable splinters, all chucked in anyhow.

"*Parbleu*," said Vedrines to Smart, who could not help being astonished by this rubbish. "I threw in the débris pell-mell, for it is only good to make a fire. But the patron intends differently. You will see."

And the patron did intend differently. "Are all the pieces there?" he asked. "*Tout. Tout*," said Vedrines. "Good," said Robert. "Then re-build." "*Hein* ?" said the staggered Vedrines.

"Re-build," ordered Robert. "Measure and copy the broken pieces. I will telegraph Farman for spares. You are a mechanic. Re-build the biplane."

"*Ah, non,*" said Vedrines.

In vain Robert stormed and implored, called on Vedrines' pride, and offered to raise his wages to £300 a month. Vedrines only shrugged his shoulders and went off for a walk: "I go back to France to-day," was all he would say. But the walk did what Robert could not do. On the aerodrome Vedrines met Blériot—rival manufacturer to Farman—he also met Morane and Audemars. The little Gascon's vanity was piqued. It was not Robert whom he saw as a rival to these competitors, but himself. If the Farman was not re-built, they would say Jules Vedrines was a poor mechanic. And Vedrines was a super-mechanic, a master-mind in aviation. Obviously, the Farman had to be re-built. "*J'y consens,*" he yelled when he came back to Jones's hangar, and without another word, Robert, Smart and Vedrines set to.

Twenty motor mechanics and carpenters were hired, and this was not easily done as every carpenter and mechanic in Bournemouth was fully booked that week. So these twenty had to be brought from London and elsewhere. The men ate and slept in the hangar where work proceeded night and day without a break, in shifts. Jones's hangar became the joke of the aerodrome: it was known as Hammer Hangar because the din never ceased. At night, they banged by the light of acetylene flares. Men were paid extra to take their food standing . . . Smart and Vedrines slept little, what sleep they took was snatched in a corner of the hangar. Robert glowered at every one when present. But most of the time, he was in London, organising the rush of supplies from France. Aeroplane parts were not easily procured those days, and if Robert had not sat screwed to the end of a telephone, offering the factory at Mourmelons ridiculous prices, the Farman would never have come together again. Smart was the 'never-leave-me Nanny,' and interpreter to Vedrines, and became the day-long buffer between the fiery little Gascon—working at fever-pitch—and the stolid, immovable British workmen who would not be

incited to quicken their efforts by the Frenchman's sardonic and blistering oaths.

At last, at the end of eight days, the aeroplane was ready. Huge kite that it was, it had been completely re-built (the Farman biplane was as light in tail and wing structure as a similar-sized kite), and the work had cost close on £1000. The general hang-together and fit of the 'plane was, however, far from good, and hours of testing and readjustment followed. The more so as Vedrines was nervous.

Rawlinson, a pilot in the adjoining shed, whose machine had also been unserviceable until a day before Jones's, had just crashed and been severely injured. His repairs had been faulty. Vedrines was determined that neither Blériot, Morane or Audemars, should be able to say that of his work. Because he, Jules Vedrines, was the world's super-mechanic, a master-mind in aviation.

So it was the last day of the Meeting—Saturday, July 16th—before Jones's engine was running sweetly, and his controls were answering as controls should. Only one event in the long list of Competitions remained: *the over-seas flight to the Isle of Wight and Back.* This event could not be run in the morning—although the day broke cloudless and serene—because the aerodrome was in mourning for Charles Rolls, who had crashed and been killed on the previous afternoon. While he was being buried, the nations' flags hung at half-mast over the hangars in tribute, and flying was suspended till mid-day.

"His death," says Robert, " was another occasion for a half-mad outburst of obstructionist sermons. ' This splendid young man has thrown his life away,' said the anti-aviationists. They seemed to be oblivious of the fact that the cause for which he had died was as great and noble as any that had claimed its toll of lives down the ages. There had been no terror for Charles Rolls in his passing. His face, as I saw him lying in his wreckage, a moment after the fall, showed nothing but a calm content.

"But the outburst had made me keener than ever to prove how wrong were the blind fools who condemned aviation as

an idle break-neck hobby, and failed to see in this development the *highway* of the future.

"My opportunity came quickly, for as I sat in the biplane testing out the engine and other points, waiting for the intimation that flying could be resumed, the morning's summer skies changed to leaden grey and the breezes of July to tricky gusts; and soon a good half-gale was blowing in from the sea, bringing in it's train a summer storm.

"Here was a priceless chance for me to show the world that aeroplanes were not just silly toys.

"The hour arrived when flying could be resumed. I sent in an official declaration, as required by the rules, that I was about to start for the Needles; and sat in my machine awaiting their acknowledgement. Instead, the Stewards rushed over and urged me not to start. They drew my attention to the rapidly-approaching storm and were surprised when I persisted that I was going to fly. I don't think they actually forbade me to fly, officially—I had to make a circuit of the aerodrome before putting out to sea and I believe they thought I would alight after that circuit and shelter from the oncoming rain.

"A group of pilots, Cody, Morane and Dixon, came and urged me not to fly. Vedrines, my mechanic, and George Smart, my friend, begged me not to go. Of course, I knew they meant well, and it was not mere obstinacy that made me disregard them; I simply meant to prove conclusively that the aeroplane was not just a fair-weather toy. . . ."

"In fact," says George Smart, "intercessions were no use. Robert had been at boiling-point all the week. He had fretted and fumed and literally cried because his machine could not be re-built in a day. Now he was ready, and what did the appeals of friends or the admonitions of the winds of Heaven signify? Robert, up to that moment had been a nonentity. A condition of things too intolerable to be borne.

'"*Lancez l'hélice*," he said to Vedrines coldly. This meant: start the propeller.

"The Stewards, having publicly eased their consciences, stood back. Vedrines started the motors and tore round to the front to adjust the carburation, and shout some last words of

advice. The hired helps clung for dear life to the tail, coughing and spluttering in the castor-oil fumes.

"As the engines revved up louder, as they shrieked and cracked and roared, the crowds in the stands awoke to the fact that a man was about to risk his life, and there was a flutter of programmes throughout the enclosures, under the leaden sky.

"Vedrines now jumped off the step of the skid and stood back clear of the broad wings. I stood back with him, feeling curiously detached. I had never seen Robert fly and I did not believe for a moment that this biplane which we had re-built out of a ridiculous assortment of splinters, linen and wire, would ever take the air. I hoped Robert wouldn't look too absurd . . . especially with the Stewards standing by . . . but, after all, that was his own look-out, there was no stopping him. Vedrines was now standing in a curious attitude of listening, and he began to nod, from which I gathered that the sound of the engines was alright. It was the time to start.

"After a pause that seemed an hour, Robert held up his hand.

"The helps let go, sprawling on the grass, and the clumsy-looking apparatus started to run along the course. Again, I felt it was all a joke. He will never, I thought, get off the ground. But the machine was gathering way, it appeared to have become lighter, less clumsy. All of a sudden I realised that the wheels had ceased to revolve and—it was in the air. At the same moment a drop of rain splashed on my face.

"In a second, the machine had risen 100 feet in the air. Then, with a lurch that sent my heart into my mouth, Robert rounded the first pylon. He continued to rise, and as he rose, the machine become more and more graceful, more and more ethereal, until it seemed to be a great dream-bird.

"Robert was barely distinguishable. If, indeed, it could be Robert who was controlling that marvellous dream-bird? But could this be the man to whom I had found it impossible to teach the simplest shot at golf? (Note: Robert always pressed at golf.)

"He had passed the far pylon and was coming up the

straight towards the hangars and the stands, when they hoisted a series of cones at the flagstaff by the judges box.

"The interpretation of these cones notified that Jones was up for the Flight across the sea to the Needles and back. Again there was a flutter of programmes all along the enclosures, followed by a perfectly audible gasp, for the clouds were closing down like a pall and the headland in the distance was hidden in sweeping mist. The whir of Robert's engine could just be heard over the wind, as he passed for the last time majestically over us.

"There was something intensely dramatic in his passing. One could see the yellow decks of his machine swaying and pitching, and just descry a solitary figure, girt in a white life-belt, leaning forward over space, as still as marble. He had achieved the compulsory double-circling of the aerodrome, and was now turning resolutely out to sea. Barely had he turned than the aeroplane was swallowed up in cloud.

"The fellah's a madman, he ought to be shut up," said a man beside me. "Gang of suiciders," said another. I forget exactly what I said to them. It didn't matter. Nothing I could say would relieve me. Robert had disappeared into space, whirling into nothingness, supported by a structure of flimsy cloth and bits of wood held together by wires; and I had let him go.

"As I passed into the hangar I became aware that I was shaking all over. There was a blinding jag of lightning and a clap of thunder, and the clouds burst. Everywhere, umbrellas appeared like a forest of black mushrooms, and at the same moment the rain came down in sheets with a high-pitched, hiss like steam. I turned to look down the hangar and was struck by its desolate emptiness. I rubbed my eyes and looked again, and realised I was missing the machine that was not there. The machine we had re-built. I tried to wonder where it was at that moment, but my imagination was numb.

"The rain was soon streaming through the canvas roof in a dozen places, and the helps huddled into a far corner where they stood in a ring, with their hands deep in their pockets and their coat collars turned up. They reminded me of barndoor

fowls. Then a man ran at me and began to gesticulate like a windmill. It was Vedrines, and his face was white and wild.

"*Vingt fois je lui ai dit qu'il ne fallait pas partir . . . vingt fois, vingt fois*," he was saying; then I became vaguely conscious that he was blaming me. Why had I let Loraine depart across the sea. Could I not observe the coming storm? It was impossible that any machine built by mortal man could live in such a tempest . . . Blériot and Morane, who came running in, were also of that opinion.

"Hours passed . . . there was no news, only Vedrines moaning that without doubt Loraine was now drowning in the sea."

Meanwhile Robert, clamping his spare hand to the plank of wood set in the open between his planes—which served him for a seat—headed his tossing machine for the Needles and flew through rain that swept down in blinding torrents.

"The velocity and penetrative power of this rain," records his diary, "was greatly increased by the speed at which I met it. Very soon I was soaked to the skin, right through my life-belt and leather-lined jacket.

"Visibility was reduced to almost nil, and with no compass or alternator and, of course, not a glimmer of a landmark to guide me, I had to guess my direction. Knowing that storms have tops and that somewhere above the turmoil was a clear blue sky, I tried to climb out of it; but it was a deep storm, and the extra weight of my soaked machine prevented me from reaching the top of the disturbance. Also, I was alarmed lest my biplane should suddenly do a cabré (fall backwards), if I kept her climbing, so there was nothing to do but drive on with the rain streaming along my planes and splashing from them back over my Gnome engine, which I expected to fail at any moment. It was a wonderful relief to me to feel it chugging into my back without ceasing.

"Presently, because I could not see, I lost all sense of gravity. I could not tell whether the earth was under me, to the right or to the left of me. Whether I was flying slantwise or straight. I was utterly lost in the dark. I had to balance the machine by guesswork after each buffeting had all but pitched me out of

my seat. My watch stopped, so I had no means of gauging the petrol expenditure, but the blind pitching in rain and cloud seemed to have gone on for hours, so I had a nasty feeling the petrol would soon be giving out.

"I must have been blown far out over the English Channel, for I was well to the South of the Isle of Wight—as it proved later—although *I* thought I had turned the 'plane successfully back towards home, when a rift in the mist disclosed a spot of green grassland, 1500 feet below me, to my left.

"This was such a surprise that I almost threw up my hands and jumped. It seems queer that I should have been so astonished, but I think I had given up all hope and was just waiting for the petrol to finish.

"I dived steeply like gannet striking, until I remembered what a dangerous strain there would be on my planes when I flattened out. So, very gently, I eased the machine back and was caught on an immense puff of wind which rose straight off the face of a cliff, and threw me up with a rush like a cork on a breaker.

"All the same I managed to land on the cliff, and as I alighted on a thirty yards strip of tableland, surrounded on all but one side by a sheer fall of rock many hundred feet to the sea, the sun shone out and the storm clouds disappeared rapidly to the east.

"I was safe, but so tired that it was several moments before I realised I had come down on a golf green, narrowly missing extermination at the eleventh hour, in the bunker guarding the green. This was the first time I had ever missed a bunker and later, when I heard it was the 18th green, I knew it was the first time I had ever done a golf-course in one."

According to a *Country Press* representative who was the first to reach him and tell him where he was, Robert did not discuss his flight, but asked for a match for his cigarette and, on hearing that the Beacon close by was a Memorial to Tennyson, burst into the prophetic lines from *Locksley Hall* on "airy navies battling in the central blue," and "pilots of the purple twilight dropping down with costly bales." The *Country Press* representative did not know what to make of him at all, but

this bursting into poetry would be typical of Robert in a state of elation; he was always outside himself after any great flight or stage performance.

Back at the Aerodrome, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu had sent out motor-boats to scour round the Needles for Jones, directly the storm had passed. Morane was also setting out in his plane, when a message arrived from Alum Bay Heights that Robert had landed there safely at 3.55 p.m.

What Smart and Vedrines said when they heard the news is nobody's business. Smart did not even resent Vedrines' long embrace. Maybe he even returned the hug, who knows?

Robert was not only safe, he had been successful. He had removed the stigma of non-appearance by providing the Meeting with its most sensational flight. And he had furthered the CAUSE, *for he had been the first man to fly in a storm.*

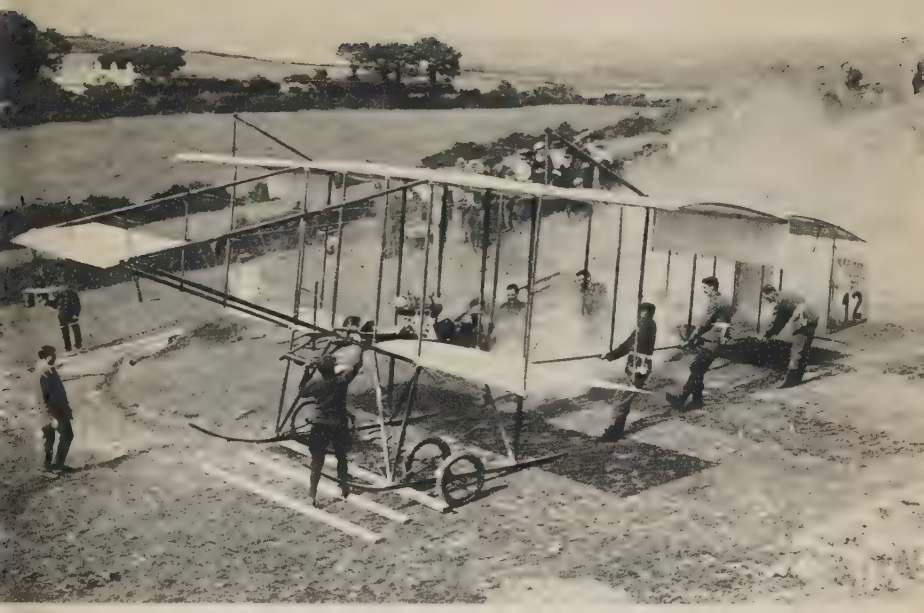
Even so, Smart and Vedrines wanted no more such afternoons.

Indeed, Vedrines was very severe when he went out by motor-launch to Alum Bay with petrol and spares. No congratulations passed his lips. "Quite an original idea," he observed when Robert took him up to the heights. "Altogether novel for an aeroplane to land like this on a sea-gull's perch. I see, as usual, you 'ave give no thought to the machine."

"*Excuse me,*" said Robert penitently, "excuse me. After all I have only broken one spar and a wheel."

"Oh well, you are strong," observed Vedrines. "Pleeze lift the machine where there is no wheel, I will take hold of the tail, and we will slide her down to de 'ole (a chalk-pit), or else she will be leaving us widout assistance from you or from me—blowing away. Simply blowing away. *Attention. Ah, lá, lá, quel diable d'appareil, et que j'ai le mal du pays.*"

Next morning the papers rang with the exploit and hailed 'Jones' as a hero. Vedrines was '*ravi*': he and 'Jones' had burst on the world in no uncertain fashion. The papers had not mentioned Vedrines, but he took all the praise as his, was he not the mechanic? Moreover he always saw himself as the world's budding foremost aviator: which, for a time, he very definitely became. *Le patron*, he decided, had evidently a flair



The Farman in the Chalk Pit at Needles Down, Isle of Wight, July 16th to 19th, 1910. Vedrines testing the engine while gunners hold on to her tail. Note the castor oil fumes.

The Farman pegged down for rain.

for making dramatic entries; so he, Vedrines, had not done so badly in becoming his mechanic.

Accordingly, Robert and Vedrines were as single-minded as 'twins' when Smart went out to Alum Bay the next day, bringing further spares. The world was sunny, Alum Bay was the centre of the sun-spot, Robert the high-light. But, although he was the centre of attraction and it was Sunday, he was unshaved—"clothed in a sweater, a leather-lined coat and breeches, and crowned with a perfectly hideous leather cap, for which he has some inexplicable affection," says Smart, "he was waiting for me on a little wooden jetty, and I cannot remember ever to have been so glad to see any one before.

"I think he was unshaved because he was in a high state of emotion. He, who had been so calm before his Flight was now quivering with excitement, and I could see it would take him a long time to simmer down.

"He drove me by cab to the heights, and then we walked up a path to a gate into a field. Here, the owner, with commendable business promptitude had established a kind of turnstile, and was charging threepence for admission to view the aeroplane.

"And there, in a chalk-pit, partially protected by a few bits of sail, was the machine. A crowd of people, controlled by a guard of Garrison gunners, were watching the antics of Vedrines, who was pegging her down.

"We made our way through these people, and I became aware for the first time in my life of the penalties and privileges of notoriety. There were hundreds of outstretched autograph books on one side, and rows of inquisitive, rather impertinent young men—reporters—with pencils and notebooks on the other. Robert is used to this form of worship. In fact, I believe it has become necessary to his complete happiness.

"Whilst he sat rather sulkily on a lump of chalk, signing autograph books as 'Robert Jones'—he has to look as though he doesn't like doing it—I walked round the machine out of pure self-consciousness. There was a staring crowd round the mouth of the chalk-pit, and somehow I felt I was expected to

walk round, test wires and pat the wings. Soon, I forgot the audience in my very real interest in the 'plane. After all, she is what we have made her. Her white wings and jaunty yellow spars were looking dingier than when I had last seen them, and she seemed a little subdued, as if she were suffering from a reaction after yesterday's terrible experience. All at once I knew she had a soul. Whether it is we who have put it there, or Robert, or the storm, I don't know. Or whether it is that she is the embodiment of so many hopes—I cannot say, but that biplane has a soul, and a great affection sprang up in my heart for her. Then I turned away, for I knew I would soon grow as idiotic about the machine as Vedrines.

"He was in a fine state of jubiliation. The French papers were about to ring with the story of his début, he told me; and the combination of himself and Robert would very shortly stagger the world.

"In the meantine he was not above haranguing the crowd. And they, being English, regarded the Frenchman as a huge joke, and guffawed heartily; all of which Vedrines received in good part, until any ill-advised or inquisitive person happened to lay a finger on the aeroplane. Then he would charge up to them, man or woman, with a ferocity that was positively alarming. He would glare into their faces: "Oh, bleeze, bleeze, no touch. *Stupide*, idiot, *imbécile*. Mister Smart, *voulez-vous expliquer à ces gens, de prendre garde à l'appareil. Oh, ces Anglais, ces Anglais. Que j'ai le mal du pays.*"

"I would then address the onlookers feebly, whilst he returned to his work, grinding his teeth, until he became absorbed in tapping and tightening some wire to the exclusion of the universe.

"After we had inspected the 18th green at the top of the hill, Robert and I had tea at the hotel near the chalk-pit. At tea, he proceeded to simmer over, and lay out the most fascinating plans. 'Did I realise,' he asked, 'that man was on the threshold of a new era, and we—he and I—were among the lucky few about to lead the English nation into it . . .' As he talked I could see he had become bitten with the idea of continuing privately and publicly to be a hero, for he mapped out

the next two months with deeds that would proclaim his valour and originality.

"I listened, dazed.

"One of Robert's failings in the matter of plans, is the belief that a day consists of 56 hours; 48 hours for continuous heroism and 8 hours for sleep. To make matters more difficult, he has constantly to be in London attending to business. This, it seemed to me, must eventually crab his aviation. So, as I am certainly not overburdened with affairs, and am just as bitten with the desire to go searching for the Holy Grail in this up-to-date fashion as he, *I* volunteered my services immediately as organiser and foreman of the works, combined.

"Robert accepted my offer, as he accepts everything that an indulgent Providence and a worshipping world offer him—imperially.

"He then returned to London.

"I am to stay at Bournemouth, organising. Vedrines is at Alum Bay completing repairs. And it has begun to rain. A fine drizzle which will drench our exposed aeroplane in the chalk-pit. I can only think of weather now in terms of aviation."

. . . . . .

On the 20th of July, the biplane was repaired and dry. Smart phoned Robert in London who came down to fly her back to Bournemouth.

In his new capacity as Jones's foreman, Smart met his chief at Lymington Junction, to discuss urgent financial settlements including the hiring of hangars. But Jones was singularly indecisive and distrait, and Smart remarked: "He had changed with his clothes. Dressed in a soft blue suit, he was once again the high-strung, artistic, imaginative Robert, whom I had not seen for weeks. I gathered he would have to don the rough, leather-lined knickerbockers and hideous leather cap, and become morose, mechanical and matter-of-fact, before I could get any sense out of him about the machine.

"All he could keep on repeating was how glad he was that flying in a storm had given him such confidence. I could not

help feeling he was not in the least confident, and again I expected he would change with his clothes."

So Smart returned to wait at Bournemouth, and Robert proceeded to Alum Bay, where a great crowd had collected. People had come from all parts of the island, as Vedrines had given it out that morning that: "*Certainment* M'sieur Jones will fly back to-day. The weather is magnifique."

The little Frenchman was mounting guard over the precious aeroplane, which he had wheeled out of the chalk-pit on to the cliff. He had struck an attitude and was forever twirling his mustachios, rejoicing in his share of the publicity.

But Robert did not come out to his biplane. An hour went by after he had been seen to arrive, and then another hour.

The spectators—many hundreds, who were waiting, strictly guerdoned back by gunners and Boy Scouts—stirred impatiently. Vedrines, at a loss to understand the delay, left his post and went to find Robert. What could it be ? He discovered *le patron*, the man who was always in a hurry, gazing indolently out of the window. "*Mais qu'est ce qu'il y à ?* " he cried. Could the man be waiting for a storm on such a cloudless afternoon? But even as Vedrines put the question, he tumbled to the staggering reply: Loraine was afraid.

" Oh, in that he was no different from any other pilot," says Vedrines. "There is not an airman among us who has not spent anguished moments after some particularly trying flight, wondering—when the hour comes for him to take the air again —whether he should go on risking his life."

Robert, himself, has left it on record that he was extremely disinclined to jump off that ledge of cliff in a machine which he had every reason to suppose had sustained hidden damage.

"Wherever I left from Alum Bay," he says, "I would find myself in irretrievable trouble if anything went wrong. It seemed such a stupid risk to take. The aeroplane had been subjected to a severe strain during the storm, and had I been able to follow my own inclination, I would have had her dismantled and sent to an aerodrome, there to be re-assembled and overhauled before I flew her again. But I could not do this unobtrusively; my flight from Bournemouth had attracted

Waiting for Jones to fly back to Bournemouth, Needles Down, Isle of Wight. Note cordon of Militia.

First wireless message to be sent from the air as Jones flew over Stonehenge in a Bristol biplane, a heavier machine than the Farman.

so much attention, it seemed I would be forced to return by air, willy-nilly—as this was the least that was expected of me."

Vedrines argued that it was absurd for a man who had flown in a thunderstorm to be afraid of doing the same trip in perfect weather; and Robert reluctantly accompanied him out to the biplane. A great cheer went up as they approached. But the aviator seemed to flinch from the cheer. It was a very morose Jones indeed, who climbed into the seat and, instead of ordering Vedrines to wind the propeller, started to examine every wire. "It was clear he was trying to find some fault as an excuse for not flying," remarks Vedrines. "At this doubting of my work, I told him: 'This is where I pack up,' but he took no notice. Then I said: 'You have only not to go, *mon patron*, and every person in this crowd will become an anti-aviationist.' This decided him, for he said coldly: '*L'hélice, please.*'"

Vedrines started the engines. Then his heart smote him. He rushed forward to the front and hissed through the roar: " Hug the coast, *mon patron.* Hug it, all the way round to the North of the Island, then you will only have a hop to the English shore."

But Robert was too occupied testing the steering to answer. Suddenly up went his hand. The Territorials holding on to the tail let go. The great bird rose into the sky while the sightseers surged after her waving handkerchiefs and shouting hurrahs from the cliff-edge. As she sailed into the blue, Vedrines could not suppress a stupified cry. He says: "Loraine, the man who was afraid, had disdained my advice, and was heading the biplane out to sea. It was over the water he intended to fly the seventeen miles that separated him from the English Coast. Had he disappointed the crowd? No. This was giving them more than they had ever hoped to see.

"*Ah, le beau geste.* How truly he always had the cause of flying at heart. And at that moment, I forgave him all his troublesome idiosyncrasies. What a man he was to serve; he always pulled the long nose at fear. Bravo Loraine."

CHAPTER VII

BLACKPOOL Aviation Carnival was the next item on the programme. It was a Flying Meeting of a type that soon became as extinct as the dodo. The promoters were purely commercial.

They were several large-scale caterers and brewers who had hired suitable ground two miles outside Blackpool and had converted it into an aerodrome. Aerial contests had been arranged to take place here during the first week in August. £5,000 was being offered in prizes. This money was divided into such small sums that the utmost any aviator could hope to win in a week was £1000; but almost every one was bound to win a little. Hence an inducement to many aviators to take part: and like pigeons they came, from Peru, Sweden, France and native England. Hangars were provided. All that remained for the success of the scheme, was that the aerobatics should prove so attractive, that the holiday crowds would crave admittance in thousands, and buy food whilst watching the flying. Then the promoters would recoup their outlay.

Unfortunately for the scheme, the crowds soon learned that 'flying' could be seen almost as well from the beach and the town.

But that has nothing to do with Jones's flying.

To Blackpool came Smart and Vedrines in the manner of those who 'go on before to make ready.' Jones was in London attending to business concerning Loraine. He would descend upon them at the appointed time, when all was prepared. As planned, it was as simple as catching a train and arriving, but like all seekers of the Grail, Smart fell among thorns.

He and Vedrines managed to lose the aeroplane. This was only mislaid in transit on the railway; but it was so effectively mislaid that Smart suspected some plot. He registered anxiety and an expenditure of some £37 odd in Trunk calls to Station-

Masters and Traffic-Managers, and stirring telegrams to Directors of Railway Boards. It was an altogether ridiculous incident, and the foolishness was not going to end there. After two days' fruitless investigations resulting in a complete failure to trace the machine, he went to look at the aerodrome. There he descried a minute Vedrines making signs in the middle of a vast expanse, and approached to discover he was in tears. Jones's hangar had only a back, a side, and a few desolate beams. "*Que faire*?" said Vedrines. "*Le patron* was arriving tomorrow and would certainly lose his reputation without a hangar or an aeroplane."

He showed Smart the only three completed sheds on the flying ground. One held an exhibition of ——— Bread, the other an exhibition of ——— Ale, the third was for Mr. Grahame-White's aeroplanes.

Grahame-White was the star turn of the Meeting. He had received a guarantee from the promoters from which certain prize monies were to be deducted. Other aviators' sheds were barely indicated. This, of course, was 'management' on the part of the promoters. Grahame-White knew nothing about it. But they had to see that all was done to enable Mr. Grahame-White to fly, if they were paying him.

Spurred by just indignation, Smart found the Foreman of Works and drew him gently but firmly towards the site of Jones's hangar. He told him that the Competitions started at 2 p.m. next day; that the Farman might arrive at any moment; that Jones hoped to do great things which would be utterly frustrated if they had no hangar in which to unpack the aeroplane.

Presently, after talking appealingly to the workmen, the foreman succeeded in herding a number of tired and sulky men into the hangar. He explained that the work had been delayed owing to hurricanes, that his men had been labouring day and night for weeks, but that he would do his best.

"Forced to be content with his assurances," says Smart's journal, "I left him still appealing to his 'boys' to do this and that little job, and went in search of fresh lodgings for Vedrines.

"Vedrines had fallen on a landlady who gave him a diet of *rien que du jambon*, and declared he would presently be out of action if he saw any more ham. He was pathetically homesick, and asked if we would not consider sending to Paris for his brother Emil who was a *charpentier de luxe*, and would do twice the work of any British assistant we engaged to help him. I promised to support this plea, and, having found a room for Vedrines, went in search of rooms for Jones."

Other aviators were staying at the Aero Club, which had already reserved rooms for Jones. But Jones was constitutionally different. He wished to be alone. So Smart fixed rooms at a small hotel on the front. After all, Jones was probably right in wishing to be alone; it was the only way to keep plans secret and spring a future surprise with *Flying*. If only it did not get him and Smart in 'all wrong' with the Flying World, and any one who could help find the aeroplane. Smart had been 'all in' with the Flying World at Southbourne. He had assisted at Drexel's departure with Delacombe; when Drexel carried Delacombe as a passenger, and Delacombe kept a log on the journey! A trip done to create confidence and recruit fresh flying enthusiasts.

He had listened much and argued long in the controversy that exercised all flying minds at the time: which was the better, monoplane or biplane ?

Jones flew a biplane; but beyond doubt a monoplane mounted quicker, and it was almost impossible to do a cabré (fall backwards) because the weight was so well distributed forward. A monoplane soon reached the height of 3,000 feet, from which height, should the engine fail, a suitable landing-ground could be selected as the machine glided down. A monoplane's glide was also less steep and more easily directed than a biplane's.

A biplane mounted slower, and all the time it was mounting the pilot was haunted by dread of a cabré; height was reached with difficulty, and should the engine fail before it was reached, the pilot was in a bad way; the downward glide was never easily controlled. In fact you had to be a more skilful pilot to manage a biplane. It had, however, one outstanding

advantage: the wings did not snap off. There had been a number of fatalities owing to the wings of monoplanes snapping off. No means had yet been devised to make these wings strong enough and yet light enough to take the air. Mechanics, pilots and designers were forever arguing over the problem.

At these and other conferences Smart had been warmly welcomed by the Flying World at Southbourne. But now he had learned that a man might not join this venture with 'Jones' and Vedrines and still call his soul his own. Jones was of the Flying World, but a little apart, as he had his own way of doing things; and Aviation to Jules Vedrines meant Vedrines alone. So Smart sat by himself in the little hotel and reflected dejectedly on the missing aeroplane.

He was an old soldier, but the hindrances he had met in the Boer and Soudan campaigns were as nothing compared to the obstructions he was now meeting as an organiser in Pioneer Flying in a civilised part of the world. Perhaps this was because it was an experiment about which he and every one else had so much to learn.

At 4 a.m. next morning he was roused by a telegram saying his aeroplane had been located seven miles down on a goods siding, but would not be along that day because of passenger traffic!

This was adding insult to injury. But the deeply-wronged and indignant Smart had no other recourse than to sally forth and knock up a traction engine owner-driver. The man was drowsy but willing; so they mounted the engine and set off in the murky dawn, chugging through the paper-littered streets of Blackpool, to find the Farman.

Seven hours later they were wending back through the town with the biplane in packing-cases securely hitched to their tail. Smart was hopeful; it was 11.30 a.m. and there was just a chance that everything would be ready for Jones and the Flying Meeting by 2.30 p.m. that afternoon. Good work, and his doing. Jubilantly he left the traction engine winding its way to the aerodrome, to engage a car. No aeroplane could fly in those days unless it was followed by road with a car,

bringing oil, petrol, spares and mechanics. Smart found a man who prided himself on never being passed on the road. This individual was hired and immediately drove him at top speed to the flying-ground, making strange shrill noises all the way there by placing two oily fingers in his mouth and blowing hard, which cleared the traffic quicker, says Smart, "than any hooter I had ever heard." At the gate of the aerodrome they passed Vedrines and the Farman. The mechanic had taken entire charge of the traction engine and was patting the cases affectionately while he issued incomprehensible orders to the driver. But his shout of greeting fell like a blow on Smart's heart.

"*Il n'y a pas de bâche sur le hangar!*" he yelled. (There is no roof on the hangar.)

So Smart sought out the Foreman of Works, who promised to give them a roof in half an hour. The rest of the shed had been indicated during the night by the addition of a few more planks and some cross-pieces. Two hours went by while they unloaded and opened the cases, then it started to rain.

"Again I found the Foreman of Works," says Smart, "and pointed out to him that it was drizzling and it would be impossible to take our machine out of its cases until we had a roof. It was two o'clock now. Horn-blowing had announced the opening of the Flying Meeting, and a crowd of would-be flight-seers were pouring in at the gates.

'"You shall have your roof in half an hour," repeated the Foreman. So we spent the next hour in getting everything in immediate readiness to unpack. Just as we had finished, the Foreman of Works passed. "The men are at tea," he said, "in half an hour's time they will start on your roof."

"'*Ah çà*," said Vedrines, "*il n'y a rien à faire, les Semaines d'Avion en Angleterre sont tout-a-fait bizarres.*"

"We covered the gaping cases with tarpaulin and went off to see what was happening to the other Flyers. No one was in the air. This was hardly surprising, as half the machines had not yet arrived, and those that had could not be unpacked, because their hangars were not ready. Drexel and McArdle were walking round, also Chavez the Peruvian, and Tétard—

former chief pilot of the Farman school—who, like Vedrines, had come to seek his fortune in England. All these men were chafing and waiting to get to grips with their machines. In Grahame-White's hangar alone, feverish activity reigned. He was there in his shirt-sleeves between two aeroplanes, directing eight mechanics, who were busy tuning up engines and adjusting wires.

"There was a prize of £100 for the aviator who remained in the air for the longest period, another £100 for whoever attained the highest altitude, and a £50 Merit Prize to be awarded at the discretion of the Judges. Grahame-White had only to do a hop to be the winner of all these; for the honour of himself and the syndicate he was working frantically. Moreover, it was five o'clock, and the hard-headed, close-fisted North country folk who had paid their shillings to come in were growing sulkier every minute. They wished to see *flying*, and every flying-man was on the ground.

"We retraced our steps towards our hangar. There we met the Foreman of Works. "The men have not returned yet, but they will be with you any moment now," he said. I expostulated. Vedrines lost his temper and cursed. But there was still hope, as to our immense surprise and great relief, 'Jones' was not yet there.

"In twenty minutes' time our hangar was still roofless and deserted. I found the Foreman of Works—his special sheetmen had been snatched away to cover a Ginger-ale store for the aerodrome café, but in half an hour . . . I threatened him with savage reports to the contractors. He wrung his hands. At that moment we were driven apart by a wild rush of cheering people who were charging in front of Grahame-White's biplane, which was being wheeled to the centre fairway. When they had passed I was left standing like a pebble on the shore. At this moment two fingers rapped on my shoulder. I turned and found Robert—in a thick white pullover, dressed for flying. 'Well?' he said cheerily. 'Are we all ready?'

"Stuttering, I pointed to our apology of a hangar, and the aeroplane which was peeping furtively from the packing-cases.

Had he exclaimed in reproach, I should have fallen at his feet. But he gave me such a savage glance of contempt, that I charged after the Foreman of Works.

'"Jones is here," I said. "Where's our—roof?"

'"It's going to blow to-night," remarked the Foreman irrelevantly, "and those sheets cost £50. . . . No, I can't take the responsibility of putting one up to-night. If it blows, it might blow off."

"For a moment I was too astonished to swear. 'Our aeroplane costs £1000,' I said at last. (Note: Smart was only thinking of the re-construction costs.)

'" I'm afraid I can't take the responsibility,"' he muttered, " at this time of the evening and with such a windy sky."

"I saw Robert a little way off, talking to one of the Stewards. I rushed up to tell him of the expensiveness of the sheet. He became white with rage, there were tears in his eyes—a mortification which increased as the distant cheering told us of Grahame-White's triumphant progress over the town towards St. Anne's.

'"I will pack up and go away at once," he said. "Close the cases." The Steward protested, cajoled. Robert remained cold. "He was deeply affected," he said, "at the thought of the promotors losing a sheet that cost £50."

"Goaded beyond endurance, the friendly Steward (Delacombe) now took it upon himself to order our roof to be fixed on at once. He coaxed the Foreman of Works by promising to go bail for the £50. The Foreman coaxed the morose working-men by addressing them as 'boys' in supplicating tones, with the result that Vedrines was able to unpack the Farman at 8 o'clock next morning."

A heavy wind was blowing and Vedrines, sensing that this might prove a temptation to le patron, was careful to dismantle the Gnome engine so that there could be no flying. She was to be fitted with a petrol tank that would enable her to stay in the air for five hours—as against a previous two-and-a-half-hour capacity.

Next day—the third day of the meeting—Jones was first in the air. But there was no doing anything with the Farman.

The five-hour petrol tank had upset her balance. She flopped ingloriously once round the course, and tumbled into an adjoining field.

Sunday, fourth day of the Meeting, there was no flying out of respect for the Sabbath. The Farman's Gnome engine was again dismantled and re-fitted with the small petrol tank. Vedrines' brother, Emil, the charpentier de luxe, arrived from Paris, and his presence acted as a miraculous pick-me-up on the mechanic's spirits. Within half an hour of his arrival, the Farman's engine was purring, as she had not purred since she had come to Blackpool. Robert and Smart marched contentedly off the aerodrome, hugging maps and secret high hopes of the morrow.

. . . . . .

Monday, August 1. *Bank Holiday.*

"The day broke golden and still," says Smart's journal. "The promenade looked as though it had been flooded with black ants. At two o'clock we drove up to the aerodrome and heard our biplane's engine roaring and cracking even as we drove up. It is astonishing, how after a time you can recognise your own engine shrieking, distinctly and apart from all others, as you would the neighing of a favourite horse.

"The Farman was out and ready, looking spry and spruce after a long morning's toilette with Vedrines. Her spars were bright, her wings had been given a touch of fresh varnish, in anticipation of being launched on great flights.

"I went in search of a steward to give warning that 'Jones' proposed to enter for the Time in Air competition. A prize was to be awarded to the aviator who remained aloft for the longest period during flying hours. Stops for petrol did not matter; the time of all his flights would be added together and the prize given on the total.

"These were the only conditions stated. But it was, of course, a deep-laid scheme on the part of the Promotors to provoke the Aviators to continuous flight for the amusement of the shilling-paying public within the palisading.

"I found a paid Steward and gave warning. He was a peevish person who dwelt upon the heavy losses the Meeting

seemed likely to incur. He intimated that it was Jones' duty to amuse the crowd as much as possible; and that, by having accepted the hospitality of a hangar, Jones was virtually a paid artist. I think he would have liked to order Jones to do a cabré and break a few limbs sensationally, as an advertisement of the thrills the public might expect for the moderate payment of a shilling.

"I left him grumbling and exhorting by turns, and reached our hangar in time to help wheel out the biplane. Robert was already in his seat, a leather cap drawn well over his glasses (spectacles he wears for short-sight) and a white life-belt tied over his leather jacket. Vedrines was issuing imperative orders to four men who were in position ready to hoist the tail. His brother and I went to either side to man the skids. Then—on the word—we heaved, and the precious biplane shook throughout her stays as she was shouldered. And on the word again, we moved—*forward*. In step, for one lurch out of step, a shifting of the weight more to one side than the other, is sufficient to buckle a spar or ruck the canvas of the wings, as long as the biplane is being moved across the ground. Once in the air, she breathes. No longer do her wires and spars resemble the cracking arches of an umbrella frame, she is filled with a strange buoyancy, due to the perfect trussing and cross-bracing of the lightest material in a weird combination of fragility and force.

"As we entered the lists and passed before the stands, a rustle of excitement went through the enclosure. We placed the biplane facing down the aerodrome. The magnificently white-coated chauffeur, and Vedrines' brother, went to cling on to the tail. Vedrines leapt to the propeller, and I ran to the centre of the course with a flag. With this I was to signal to Robert as soon as he passed overhead, whether to our eyes the Farman was behaving nicely or not.

"A cold feeling was upon me, for Robert was about to start on his most ambitious flight. But, unlike the afternoon of the trip to the Isle of Wight, the weather was glorious and full of encouragement.

"By the time I had reached my position, the biplane was

already free and lumbering along the ground. She rose easily after 40 yards and rounded the bottom pylon at a fair height. She mounted quickly, and I watched her with pride, as she swept up the course gaining altitude each instant. Then as THEY—Robert and the Farman—passed above me, I held my flag high in the air, signifying that all was well and the biplane was behaving splendidly. She had already become the dream-bird again. So, instead of turning at the bottom pylon up the course once more, as was expected—for it was thought that Robert was only circussing to amuse the public—the plane headed straight out over the palisadings, over the red-brick villas, South towards the sea.

"When it was only an indefinite brown speck on the horizon I turned and bolted for the motor-car which was in front of the hangar. It was the centre of a fussing throng of journalists and officials demanding our intentions. The Vedrines brothers were loading up with tools and petrol. I succeeded in hustling the Frenchmen aboard and, turning a deaf ear to enquirers, exhorted Gibbs, the chauffeur, to great deeds. He drove furiously out of the paddock, away on the South road, defying all authorities and pursuers, manipulating the wheel with one hand and emitting cat-call whistles with the other, till we came to a point on the shore some three miles South of the aerodrome, where we had established a base to follow Robert's progress down the coast by telephone."

. . . . . .

Meanwhile, back at the aerodrome, Grahame-White was cutting exquisite figures-of-eight between taking up passengers for ten-minute flights. Tétard was flying round and round. Chavez was soaring into the heights; and A. V. Roe had caused a sensation by bringing out a triplane of his own design, which had been assembled out of spars and bits of canvas got together on the aerodrome during the past four days. Jones was out of sight and out of mind until a megaphone message over the course suddenly announced that *Mr. Jones is now flying over Liverpool.*

There was a gasp. This beat Grahame-White's flight earlier that day to Southport. Quarter of an hour later, the mega-

phone announced: *Jones has flown over the Mersey and is now passing over Egremont.*

Followed a babble of excitement and conjecture. It mattered little now that Tétard was going round and round, or that Chavez was soaring, the question was: Where was Jones?

Like clockwork the megaphone broke over the course every quarter of an hour.

Jones is rounding the tower over New Brighton.

Jones has passed over Birkenhead and is now re-crossing the Mersey.

Jones has been seen at Formby Head, flying at a height of 500 feet; he is apparently on his way back to the aerodrome.

It was the finest cross-country flight of the year in England or France, beating Paulhan's London-to-Manchester by reason of the greater risks involved in meeting contrary air-currents crossing river estuaries. So when the next megaphone call announced:

Jones has had engine trouble and has come down on a sandbank in the Ribble. The tide is rising and there is a channel between the sandbank and the mainland—there was grave anxiety.

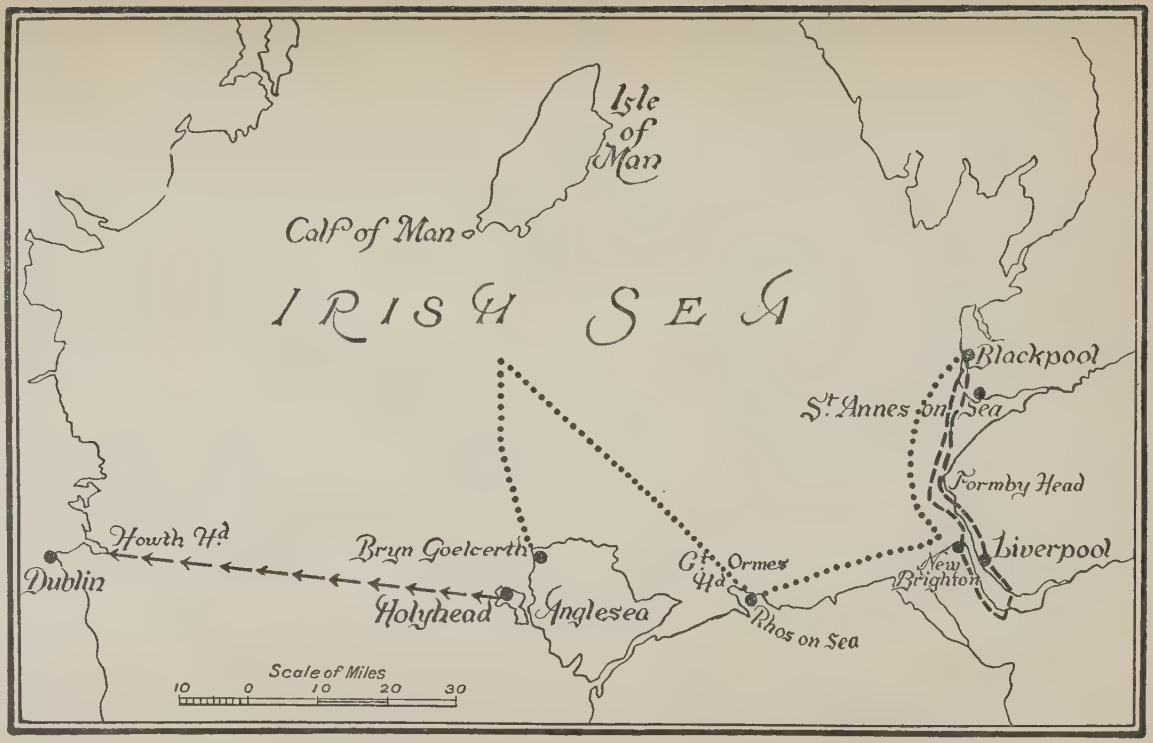
"He is bound to break his neck or be drowned," said cheerful journalists. "The man attempts too much."

Smart, who had been following the flight by telephone, glued to a receiver in the hotel at St. Anne's-on-Sea, rushed out when he heard that the biplane could be seen crossing the bay. His eyes sought the sky, but, blinded by the sun, he could see nothing. Then a barmaid clutched his arm and said: "It has fallen into the sea."

"Where—where?" he asked.

"I don't know," she moaned. "But it fell hissing into the sea."

The demented Smart tumbled into the car and hurtled off to the Flying-ground. Perhaps some one would have the sense to ring up there, he thought. At the Flying-ground they said: "Hurry, hurry, your man's plane will be swept up by the tide at Fairhaven. How is he? Don't know. No news." So, equipped with two policemen on the stepboards to clear the traffic, they hurtled back to Fairhaven—just round the North-



– – – *represents the flight on Monday, August 1st, 1910, from Blackpool to Liverpool and New Brighton and back.*

..... *is the flight from Blackpool to Rhos-on-Sea, on Wednesday, August 10th, 1910. An over-sea world record, the distance flown was over 60 miles. The continuation, when Loraine was lost flying over the Irish Sea towards the Calf of Man, was never charted, but it was actually his longest over-sea trip. The petrol gave out on him.*

→→→ *Loraine's flight to Howth Head, Ireland, September 11th, 1910.*

ern corner of St. Anne's—expecting to meet they did not know what disaster, and instead met their man beaming over a golf club tea.

All reports had been exaggerated, happily. He had not come down in the Ribble, but on the firm seashore. True that the waves were now rippling up to the plane where she stood on the sand, with an enormous black bubble disfiguring her tail; but Robert had thought it wisest to risk the tide and let himself be carried off to tea by golfers whilst other golfers formed a voluntary cordon round the plane. "For if I'd allowed any one to shift her," he told his gang, "they would have cracked her up. And I knew you would come."

"*Parfaitement, parfaitement*," said Vedrines, who was lining up the experts—Smart, his brother and the chauffeur—to hoist and wheel the Farman up the beach, while Robert burbled over to them on his Flight.

. . . From Southport to Formby Head, along to Liverpool, all the little seaside piers had dimpled up at him, as people waved scarves, parasols and handkerchiefs. The Farman had flown as never before, as he did not think it possible for a machine to fly. This time he and the plane had become one. Usually he felt as though he were flying in spite of her. Liverpool had looked quite small from the air, surprisingly. It had never been flown over till to-day, and every ocean-going liner, tug and vessel in the Mersey had saluted him on its steam whistles and sirens . . . as he remembered having been saluted when he sailed for the Boer War . . . he could just hear the screech of the sirens above the roar of his engines, and had gone on his way exulting. Then he had crossed to New Brighton, and flown over the town where as a boy he had dreamed of flying . . . and felt so supreme, he had burst into song . . .

"*Jamais chanter*," observed Vedrines, who was hard at work cutting away the black bubble in the tail. "*Quand on chante, on s'oublie. Danger, danger.*"

But Robert had continued singing he knew not what and the journey home had passed like winking, until he had suddenly become aware that the plane was losing height for

no reason, and on looking round perceived the curious black bubble in his tail. This—Vedrines said—had been caused by oil from the motor being blown by a head-wind back on to the tail. The saturated fabric had bellied up, thereby reducing the lift of the plane, so that it was only with difficulty that Robert had got over the bay and come to earth on the edge of the sands. Still—bubble or no bubble, he had done it again. The flight was a record.

Now it was supremely important that he should get back into the air and to the aerodrome, or he might lose the Time in Air Prize. So Gibbs, the chauffeur, charged up and down keeping back the crowd; Vedrines beetled his brows, intent on rivetting and pasting on fresh canvas over the tail; Smart fished children out from under the wings; Robert discoursed amicably and signed autographs . . . magic minutes slipped into a magic hour.

The sun was sinking before the tail was sound, and a waste of ten precious minutes followed, persuading spectators to stand clear. Then, as Robert whizzed down the eager human lane and rose to rousing cheers, the hurrahs dimmed to an Ah! of sheer wonder as the loftier sun-rays caught the plane and turned the wings to copper, then to gold. The fire-bird vanished over slate rooves, winging home.

The car rattled after it fast; so fast, they had later to answer a summons for speeding. But Robert alighted before the Judges' Box on the Grand Stand long before Smart and the others arrived! alighted and heard the verdict, bewildered.

He went to meet the others at the big gate of the aerodrome.

"A glance at his face was enough to freeze the congratulations on my lips," says Smart, "he was glowering. It was no longer the pleasant, successful Robert of half an hour ago. This was the fighting, kicking Robert. Robert in a towering rage.

'"What do you think?" he asked. "They've disqualified me for all the time I was out of sight of the aerodrome. I should have stayed here and flown round like a bumble bee in a fit."'

"I was angry now. We said other things—oh, a lot of other things. But what is the use of recording them? It

transpired that if Robert flew for another 15 minutes in sight of the aerodrome, he would be eligible for the second prize.

'"I'll do it," he decided. So up he went again and flung himself round the course, carelessly slipping at corners, giving a horrible performance. The biplane's engine seemed to me to shriek like an angry woman's voice, nagging at the Press Stand, sneering at the enclosures, withering the Judges' Box with sarcasm . . . till he came down, still white with indignation, but a winner of the Second Prize—£50—for Time in Air.

"He had been aloft a total of 2 hours and 15 minutes, had made a record cross-country flight, while the man who received the First Prize had been up an hour and a half and never left the Flying-ground.

"But, of course, that man had entertained the shilling-paying public for the promotors of the Flying Meeting.

"All the same we had a merry dinner that night, drinking —I in champagne and Robert in cocoa—to the Glory of Flying and the damnation of our enemies. And to A. V. Roe and his marvellous feat of the triplane."

CHAPTER VIII

DISCUSSING the Press Accounts of the flight, next day, Smart says: "I am bound to say 'Jones' had been pretty generally appreciated, except by those particular journals which do not employ a man specially for aviation, but rely on the Reuter reports. Not many of the better papers do this; in fact it is only the best papers that ignore Aviation. One in particular, a famous organ that is considered to express the opinions of better-class England, has lately found it necessary to retrench, and has started by promptly retrenching its aviation expert.

"The reports flattered, angered and amused us by turn. The one that Robert liked contained the phrase: 'Jones, who has a penchant for doing the most surprising things in the most nonchalant way.' So his nonchalance was coming across! Good. He wanted aviation to appear easy, as directly the public saw it was easy, they would take it up and the *cause* would advance.

"The assumption of absolute unconcern on his part—which sometimes baffles and worries Vedrines—appeals to his sense of the dramatic. If only he were not so keen on reading newspaper reports. I cannot understand that a man of his character, who always flouts authority and doesn't give a hoot for popularity, should want to know what is written about him. But the morning after any exploit of his he sends out for all the papers, and it is not until he has pored over them and read the last high-sounding compliment on himself that his mind can resume its hold on current events and he turns in high good humour to black tea and cold bacon.

"Thus it was that at twelve o'clock he was still resplendent in an eau-de-nil kimono, and myself interesting—I like to believe—in a jibbeh taken off the body of a dervish killed at Omdurman, when Vedrines was announced.

"We did not expect him and immediately surmised an

accident to the Farman. 'Had anything gone wrong with the biplane?' we asked. 'Mais non, mais non, all was well,' he replied. He had evidently come straight from the barbers, for his hair was glistening with grease and the prongs of his moustache had been pomaded into two ferocious-looking spikes. '*Violà*,' he said, producing a telegram, and stood testing the sharpness of his spikes while Robert read it out.

"'Come at once,' it said. 'Jack and Juliet badly scalded. Your wife collapsed.—Brédon. Paris.'

"Monsieur Brédon—Vedrines explained—was a doctor. His wife was an hysterical woman, and it was obvious he must leave for Paris at once.

"Vedrines' leaving would put a stop to all flying for the moment, just as our plans were launched. . . . We looked at each other. . . . Robert swallowed his discomfiture as best he might, paid Vedrines and dispatched him to Paris, telling him to stay as long as it was necessary, although Vedrines promised effusively to be back in three days. '*Juste le temps pour y aller, voir, et revenir*,' said our mechanic.

"But even as he left the room, our hearts sank as we realised our utter helplessness without him. Vedrines has many faults, but he is a genius when it comes to wheedling a biplane. We still had his brother, it is true, but whatever Emil might be at carpentering, he was right off his stroke with aeroplanes. He was a *douceur* to keep Vedrines happy."

The Farman sulked and refused to fly. Robert, taking his cue from the machine, sulked and refused to fly also.

It was a pity, for it was just at a moment when the publicity from his cross-country flight might have been turned to good financial account. The promoters of the Blackpool Aviation Meeting would willingly have paid him a handsome fee to flit round the aerodrome and take up joy-riders. But Robert would have disdained serving as an *air-taxi*. Besides, his landings were never very neat—he was nothing like such a skilful safe flyer as Grahame-White—and he had no wings without Vedrines. It was simpler altogether to take umbrage at the shabby treatment accorded to his recent big flight, and be too proud to fly.

Thus it was that his aviation was always to cost him money and make him a poor man, and never to gain the recognition it deserved, for he always fell out with those who sat in high places. It may be held that he flew solely for the pleasure and glory of Robert Loraine, but that pleasure and glory also lay in the advancement of aviation.

A psycho-analyst might have seen in the deliberate flouting of all who were in authority, indication of an inferiority complex; else why this unwarrantable and invariable assumption of superiority, except to those who knew him. *They* were always astonished by his shyness and humility. Especially his humility. Not that they could ever account for his behaviour: for he remained calm under circumstances where another man would have been exasperated, displeased when he should have been happy. Complex. Variable. Sometimes this was because he saw farther than those who were with him. Sometimes it was his tendency to be dramatic. Sometimes it was a sudden shyness. One never knew.

At other times he was the simplest, most straightforward and reliable person. No one could make amends like Robert Loraine, did he think he had been at fault. If a friend needed help, he gave his right arm; and if he had alienated some one whom he wished to win back, he never failed to reconcile them.

As Vedrines said, there was an essential and irresistible *largeur* about the man. And he was human; frequently absurd; quick to be jolly; ardent, lovable. He could be all that was winning and attractive when he was in the mood.

Smart, who was devoted, near, and yet clear-sighted, failed to analyse him completely. He may have been too close. At one place in his journal, speaking of Robert's habit of coming to cross-purposes, he remarks: "He is constitutionally a revolutionist. All forms of restriction are to him anathema. He rejoices in an attitude of splendid isolation, and confronts the world, so to speak, with fists clenched and eyes blazing pugnaciously. He has not arrived at his present successful position without a considerable struggle, from which he has learned that sooner or later the world will turn round and hit

him. Therefore he is always on the watch, and usually succeeds in hitting first.

"Unfortunately he carries this to extremes. And, now that he is successful, passes on his way over the prostrate forms of numberless inoffensive and wholly astonished people. Yet the last thing the man is, is a bully. I expect he has had to struggle harder than any one knows to get what he wants. . . ." Maybe it was the effect of his first hardening-off in the Sailor's Dive, where a man either fought or succumbed. Who knows?

. . . . . .

The days Vedrines spent in Paris were spent by Jones at Blackpool projecting deep-laid plans into the future. Prodigious flights were to be accomplished: world records.

Over this Smart says: "I sometimes think that Robert has more than a touch of megalomania, but when he is making secret plans, his enthusiasm carries me away. Like a boy playing at Red Indians, he foresees enemies at every turn striving to wrest the spoils from his grasp. In this case, it is his fellow-aviators who will forestall his flight if they get wind of it. So he has carefully given out to the Press that he will attempt no more sensational flying. The Vedrines brothers—our mechanic has returned from Paris, singularly uncommunicative about the burned children but brimful of excitement—are Gascons, and thrive on spinning fiction to the reporters who drift round the hangar. Gibbs, the chauffeur, who divulges all when he is drunk, knows nothing. Vedrines does not think the machine will stand the strain of two oversea flights in quick succession—one to Douglas and then from Douglas on to Ireland; nor can I arrange for a proper service of tugs to mark and watch the course. And to think the French Government voluntarily supplied Blériot with an escort of battleships when he crossed the Channel—a mere twenty miles—while this on either side is sixty!

"As the Douglas project has been abandoned, Robert wants to fly over mountainous areas—Snowdonia, for choice. Vedrines' reaction to this was: '*Ah, quelle sacrée idée, la pauvre biplane.*' So I have persuaded Robert to fly along the *coast* to Holyhead, and hop from there to Ireland.

"He suffers from the perpetual illusion that our only embarrassment is a shortage of fresh worlds and skies to conquer, until I bring him back with a bump to the limitations of the machine."

It was on August 10th that Robert rose at 4.30 a.m. to slip away on his longest surprise flight. Accompanied by Harry Delacombe (the friendly Blackpool Meeting Steward), who had a special key to the Hangar Enclosure, and one journalist—a flying enthusiast—whom he had admitted into his confidence, he drove to the aerodrome.

"Gibbs," remarks Smart, "incapable of being punctual, was only twenty minutes late. Robert waited for him on the corner of the street, a little away from us all, showing enforced and increasing calm. He himself was all ready—so as to waste no time—in leather cap, white polo sweater and lifebelt, carrying a suit-case filled with novels in case of a breakdown. It is one of his characteristics that he never fusses or blames, whatever goes wrong, once he starts out on a trip. He reserves his strength . . . and it is well that he does, for it is quite extraordinary how many things combine to try the nerves when a man goes flying. For instance this lateness of Gibbs' might have meant the loss of ten minutes of windless weather so precious to an aviator, so important to the distance record of his flight. As a point of fact, it meant nothing, for when we got to the aerodrome, the Farman's engine refused to start. Vedrines cursed and coaxed alternately; she had been fed with oil and spirit to the limit, every wire and cylinder had been tested and re-tested, the day was breathless, the sky was clear, then at last we tumbled to it: the ground-mist had interfered with the carburation.

"It was not until 6.30 when the sun was high and had shredded the mists to wreaths, that the engine sang out loud and clear, revved, roared and rose, bearing Robert southward and seaward once again, to the good wishes of early workmen who had entered the aerodrome."

Fog, in great cotton-wool banks four hundred feet high, obscured coastline and landmarks for Jones, but the machine soared like a bird in the sunlight above this. Never had the

man flown in such ideal calm, the only curious thing was that he *could not stop climbing.*

"It was only by exerting all my strength," he records, "and pushing down on the *elevator control lever* that I could keep the plane on a horizontal course. When I did this, the elevator control lever bent like a bow drawn to the full and the strain set up throughout the whole structure was alarming.

"This was due, no more nor less, to the wrong adjustment of the incidence of the planes, by my *charpentier de luxe*, Vedrines' brother.

"I was on point of turning back, for my right arm was becoming numbed by the effort necessary to hold the plane on a level course, when a panorama of such loveliness unfurled before me in the long range of Snowdon's mountains, winking like diamonds above an opal mist, that I could no more have turned my back on them than a true believer on paradise.

"As I looked at these crests piercing the glowing clouds, I forgot the pain in my arm, and my fright at the curving elevator control, and was only conscious that I wished to press on to the hills. Luckily, at about this time I caught sight of New Brighton Tower in a clearing in the fog, and veered slightly to my right, to keep my course, or would have flown wide of the mark. All the while I was passing over the sea, as that way was quickest. Wherever the fogs lifted, water glittered like glass, and whenever I struck a headland after crossing some estuary, yellow sands would run away from below me like tape on a roller, in a way that would have made me giddy had I looked down for long. But always, to the left and before me, were my hills, baring their glistening shoulders, majestic and eternal.

"Entranced, I flew on, exalted, until I was about to hit yellow sands again, where the peninsular of the Great Orme heads out to the sea. Looking down, I also caught sight of my watch and saw I had been up an hour and a half. Well, petrol wouldn't last for ever, and I happened to be over a golf course. The decisive moment had come. I had to descend. The question was, would the elevator control lever stand the

strain of being bent yet farther over, or snap? Indeed, could my numbed arm bend it over at all?

"I strained and strained; at last it moved over, and nothing snapped. The sweat was pouring off me as I switched off the current, and immediately a swifter rush of air began whistling past my head as the earth dashed up to meet me. At three hundred feet I switched on again and eased up, selected a spot free of bunkers and, turning towards it, cut off and came down on a fairway which gleamed like an emerald—came down so gently, that not a daisy was bruised. Decidedly, Vedrines would say my landings were improving.

"I was met by a man who ran out over the greens in pyjamas, waving a toothbrush. He took me to the club-house to breakfast while other members went out to rope off my machine. In a very short time crowds began to appear; golf was abandoned for the day as the sightseers surged round the plane and settled down in picnic parties. They poured in from Colwyn Bay on the one side and Llandudno on the other. I had alighted at Rhos-on-Sea."

It was a thousand pities that Vedrines' brother, that *charpentier de luxe*, had ever laid hands on the Farman. Had it not been for the foolish business of the wrong adjustment of the incidence of the planes, Robert might have filled up with petrol and taken off there and then for Salt Island, Holyhead. But as it was, he had to wait for Vedrines' arrival by car to readjust the Farman.

By that time—it was 3 o'clock when Vedrines appeared on the scene—the crowd of sightseers was between ten and fifteen thousand strong. Wires had been buzzing over the country with news of Jones' new overseas record, sixty-three miles in one-and-a-half hours, the longest cross-water distance yet flown. Back at Blackpool, the flight had first been attributed to Grahame-White, who had thereupon chucked his £2,000 Aerodrome Exhibition Flying contract to the winds and flung his machine over and back across Morecambe Bay. But even that was a mere flea-jump as compared to winging to Rhos-on-Sea. And at Rhos-on-Sea, 'Jones' was hailed as having fulfilled a Bardic prophecy.

Two months before, the Chief Bard had prophesied that a man with wings would come across the mountains to them that summer, and lo and behold a Welsh Jones had descended "The poetic Welsh temperament was so moved by the inspiring idea of human flight," says Robert, "*that hundreds of women brought their children and begged me to let the little ones touch me.*

"There was a far more genuine perception of the significance of 'flight' in this crowd of dwellers in the hills than in the comparatively superficial and inquisitive sight-seeing attitude of the English."

Very amusing are the accounts of hard-headed Yorkshire journalists who raced to the spot for their papers, and spoke of the nonchalant young flyer, sitting alone on the verandah of the club-house, smoking cigarette after cigarette into the golden afternoon, while a motionless circle of watchers stood round him, gazing their fill. This circle was removed from him by fifteen feet. Young women also stood on the club-house verandah, motionless, gazing their fill. None was so brazen as to go up to him. But whenever a journalist broke reverently through the circle, to ask for an interview, hundreds of autograph-books were passed up in an endless chain. These Robert duly signed as Jones, and kept signing them till the secretary of the Golf Club re-appeared and indignantly restored him to the untouchability of an exhibit. "Then the aviator's chin would tilt up again as he gazed into space and puffed placidly on. He is a genial, unassuming man," says the *Liverpool Echo*, "whose manner gives no indication of his qualities of intrepidity and skill."

How could it?

Robert was feeling utterly relaxed and satisfied with the day and himself; rather God-favoured in that he had accomplished this flight on a defective machine. When he went out to his aeroplane at 4.25 p.m. he was dazed with crowd-worship, in a state of beatitude.

Then began one of the severest trials in his flying life: *The crowd refused to clear a path for the Farman to run and rise.* For two and a half hours Robert waited in his seat, monumentally calm, but eager to seize the first chance to be off.

During this time journalists implored and cajoled the mob, the Golf Club secretary threatened, a band of Pierrots lent assistance and boy scouts tried to make a cordon which would result in a lane. But the people would not understand. They thought that the nearer they were to the plane the better they would see it go up. Also they thought it would ascend vertically, so each time they were pushed back they closed in again. It was not until Police came on the scene at 7 o'clock that 'Jones' was able to whizz the Farman along the ground. He kept her down for a longer run than usual and then skyrocketed her into the air to clear a line of telegraph wires. The crowd, who had never seen a plane rise before, went mad. Jones only waved once in response to their cheers, he was so concerned with the lateness of the hour and fact that Smart would be waiting for him at Salt Island, wondering what had gone wrong.

The sun was very low and the Great Orme's head stood out against a luminous sky. The sea was calm and opalescent in the evening light. It seemed to him foolish to turn in and follow the coastline when, by striking out to sea over the Great Orme, he was sure to hit Point Lynas in Anglesey and cut off fifteen miles. By doing that he would be with Smart in half an hour.

That was his intention. But . . .

An hour later Smart was still waiting on the cliff slope at Salt Island, a little black speck of a man peering up between lines of white table-cloths lent by the Irish mail-boats, and pegged out on the grass to mark suitable landing-ground. Nearby was a newly-constructed shed built by the Marine Yard for the Farman. Admiral Leslie Burr, Admiral of the Port, had placed an army of workmen at Smart's disposal. All was in readiness. But where was Robert?

Robert was lost over the sea. Crowd-worship had dulled his sense of precaution. He had also been incredibly fatigued by the two and a half hours waiting. Once in the air he had flown on and on out to sea, dreaming. Haze banks had hidden the coast of Anglesey in front of him, and had swiftly veiled in the coast he had left behind him. His course should have

been due West from the Great Orme's Head; instead, misled by the North-Westerly direction of summer sunset, it was North-North-West out over the Irish Channel.

"I awoke to find there was no sign of land," he writes. "Not a ship in sight to break the solitude, only unreal water which glistened here and there where the heat haze did not obscure it. The compass tied to my left-hand strut was useless owing to the vibration of my engine and the deviation caused by the magneto. Where was I? I had no instruments to tell me what my course should be. My wrist-watch told me that my petrol tank was more than half empty. I felt rather a fool and that I was justifying the many accusations against me of recklessness. Where could I be?

"A wonderful red and orange sunset stretched over a third of the horizon and indicated the west but vaguely, for the sun was behind clouds. Fantastic bluffs and headlands came and went, mirage-fashion, over the horizon-line the sunset did not occupy. These bluffs and headlands led me on awhile, in the hope that they were Anglesey. Then I realised I must have long since passed the island and left it on my left, and that I was now well over the Irish Sea.

"What could be simpler, you will say, than to turn straight back and fly a little to my right. But I was like the desert traveller, only more so. With no fixed point by which to set my course, the one thing certain was that it could not be straight. So I climbed in large circles, searching the widening horizon for *land*. By gaining height, I thought—and sure enough I saw it. A welcome sight it was, although it was in the wrong place. With my nose pointing to the sunset, the land I sought should have been behind me to my left; but what I saw was far behind me on my right—N. by N.E., not W. by S.W.

"It was, of course, the Isle of Man, or, rather, the Calf of Man, and as I made for it instinctively, it needed all my will to remember that Holyhead was the place I meant to reach; that I must turn and fly straight away from the Calf of Man and go South, keeping the sunset on my right, and maintaining a careful watch and then, perhaps, the range of

vision from my great height might show me Anglesey. I did this, and for a long time saw nothing except the dull glow of the red sunset. When I circled round again I had even lost the Calf of Man; the surface of the sea was going into shadow, although there was still light at the height I was flying. My petrol was nearly exhausted. I felt a little lonely, but the sunset colours imparted a sense of cosmic serenity, although I did feel rather like a Tomlinson shrieking through space. If death came now, at least it would be at the end of a perfect day. Then suddenly Anglesey jumped into view, just where I had expected it to be. The whole island was clearly outlined and unmistakable—in apparent size that of a tea-tray. Need I say I steered straight for the tea-tray?

"Would my petrol hold out? For the first time, I grew really anxious as the sight of Anglesey had revived hope in me, and as I flew nearer the tea-tray, the little problems of my daily life crept back into my mind . . . my engine stopped about a mile from shore, but I was high enough to glide to land, and so I made my first *volplané*."

At 1 a.m. Robert drove up to the Station Hotel at Holyhead in a farm-cart. According to Smart: "It was an extremely grubby and somewhat sobered 'Jones' I seized by the hand. As a rule, after big flights, he is in a state of ebulition, but a man does not spend an hour and a half in space—as I learned later—not knowing which way to turn to reach terra firma, without becoming a little serious.

'"A perfect atterisage," he said, greeting me characteristically and simply, but with a look of bland innocence which showed me he was feeling guilty, "in a field sixteen miles from here. Are the tugs ready?" I told him six tugs were waiting to steam into the Irish Channel and mark his course. "Good," he replied. "Then I'll fly the Farman in to-morrow and get straight off to Dublin. Nothing is broken. The people at the farm there only speak Welsh, but I've pegged her down safely under the lee of a hill."

"I was glad to be able to tell Vedrines that nothing was broken, (he had arrived in the car with the tools from Rhos) and went to confer with six sea-captains, leaving Robert to

the mercies of journalists, who had appeared from every corner of the hotel, like policemen at a fight in Leicester Square."

Next day, to quote from one of those same journalists: 'Jones jumped merrily into his car and went off with his mechanics to the aeroplane, expecting to be at Salt Island within the hour.

'That was at eleven. Ever since then,' says the journalist, 'we have been looking across the wide bay, but a diabolic wind keeps him at his base beyond the far blue headland. The wind averages fifteen miles an hour, rising in sudden gusts to twenty; it is these gusts that make it impossible to fly. At intervals of an hour the tugs have been driving out to sea to take up their appointed stations in the Channel, and now only one remains.

'They are strung out in a straight line slightly north of west all the way to Ireland, at seven-mile intervals. The farthest is two miles from the Kish lightship, which is only a few miles from Kingstown and well in sight of land. Each ship carries a rocketer, who will let off smoke-bombs as soon as he sights Mr. Jones. As the tug will also immediately commence steaming with him, danger is reduced to a minimum.'

Later.

'Very depressed, but in no way disheartened, Mr. Jones returned to his hotel at Holyhead by motor-car late this evening, driving through a rainstorm.

'He has spent an extremely tiring day, waiting constantly on the alert for a lull which would allow him to make the quarter of an hour's dash to Salt Island. Nevertheless, his energy is undiminished, and at present his proposal is to get up at three to-morrow morning and go off again to Cemlyn, near which village the aeroplane lies in a deep valley.

'At present the wind is whistling across the harbour and howling under the station roof. As an instance of the complexities of travel in North Wales, the name of the exact spot where the machine lies is *Cae'bendu'bryn'goelcerth'llanfairynghornwy*.'

CHAPTER IX

CAE'BENDU'BRYN'GOELCERTH'LLANFAIRYNGHORNWY certainly expressed the back of beyond where Robert had chosen to alight. "It was a strip of wilderness that could only be reached by eight miles of execrable cart-tracks, up and down impossible gradients over outcrops of rock and shale," says Smart. "On every motor journey several tyres were burst.

"The Farman itself lay in a cup of a place, the centre of a circle of pudding-basin hills. At the bottom were a few acres of level ground, intersected by stone walls and streams. It was completely sheltered from the winds and for that reason intensely dangerous and deceptive for flying, for the winds lay over the top of the hollow like a solid lid."

Smart did not like Llanfairynghornwy from the start. He was suffering from an unaccountable foreboding; but Robert was not in the least worried; he was fully optimistic. There had been no flying the previous day, not because of the wind, but because a sow had eaten the entire bucketful of *col du pâte*, with which Vedrines was to varnish the wings of the plane. On the exact consistency of this col du pâte and the way it was put on depended the tautness and consequent carrying power of the wings. Vedrines had only left the bucket for a moment—on being called away to look at some point in the engine—and a wandering sow had hogged it all up, as well as scratching her back against the tail of the biplane and smashing that. It was enough to make any mechanic weep. By the time Vedrines had made the Welsh people at the farm understand that he wished to cook up another mixture of glue and paste in their kitchen, a rain-cloud had broken; the wings of the plane had been wet, the paste would never dry . . . and it would be folly to depart without having re-pasted the wings. The little Gascon collected hay and canvas and made a bed for his brother and himself under the machine, where they

spent the night on either side of the bucket of paste. *Quelle vie que celle d'aviateur!*

Back at the Holyhead hotel that evening, Smart recalled the tugs that had been lying out over the Irish Channel all day; and, after dining, Robert signed a cheque for their hire. "This operation," says Smart, "brought tears to our eyes, for tug-hiring is the most expensive sport I've met. I went to bed weighed down with gloom.

"Dramatically, we had already failed. Oh, Robert will fly the Irish Sea, indeed he is now bound to do so, as all England knows of our plans. But there is no chance of springing a *surprise*. Another flyer may even forestall us. Robert's flight to New Brighton from Blackpool and back has already been repeated. The punch seems to me to be out of the enterprise."

But Robert—not a whit deterred—was out and away in a stinging sou'-wester at five next morning. Smart kept the tugs in harbour on a retaining fee that amounted to close on a hundred pounds, but which was only a third of the sum they had cost when stretched out over the Channel. He frowned anxiously at the weather-cups revolving on the turrets at Salt Island. They registered a wind between thirty-five and forty miles an hour. He never dreamed that Robert would attempt to fly. For Robert had promised he would take no untoward risk, in view of the importance of the Irish Sea flight.

All the same this is the story that the *Manchester Guardian* took down over the phone from their Holyhead reporter that night: '*Jones' biplane is smashed up*. He started from his field behind Bryn Goelcerth Farm at half-past seven this evening. He flew a hundred yards with the wind behind him. He could not rise soon enough or high enough to escape the mounting land a field away, and down he came on a low mound. His chassis crumpled up beneath him. His propeller struck the earth and was split to splinters. Then his planes touched and cracked up in half a dozen places. He had leaped from his seat at the first crash, and turned only to see his machine a chaos of torn spars and canvas on the grass.

'Was there ever such hard luck? All day long he had

waited. The sun shone and the sky was blue, but the wind from the south-west remained. I had turned a dozen times to look at him standing on the top of the hill that shelters Bryn Goelcerth farm, and like a monument he stood against the sky; so seldom did he move. It was the weather he was watching all the time; the calm he was waiting for. He would not come down. They took his tea to him up there, so keen was he on not losing the first quarter of an hour's calm that offered. It was at about 7.20 p.m. that we saw him first coming down the hillside. The wind seemed to have ceased. He was going.

'His two French mechanics, the brothers Vedrines, had been guarding his biplane the whole day and night. They lay on the grass underneath it in the wind and rain of the early hours—they had shaved by its side this morning—nothing would induce them to leave it for a moment. Now they jumped up from their seats on the grass, and by the time Mr. Loraine (Jones) reached his aeroplane they had by eager French words and gesticulations shepherded the crowd into line behind the machine.

'All was ready in a very short time. The biplane was on a little slope whence it could get up a good pace to rise. Jules started the engine while Emil and I and half a dozen weird Welsh islanders held the biplane back on the tail. The raising of Loraine's left hand was the signal for us to let go, and away he went. After 50 yards he rose. The islanders yelled with delight; old men and wrinkled women who had driven to the farm and stabled their ponies in the shippons; farm hands, young and strong, with brown faces and Celtic eyes; lads and lasses with bare brown legs; visitors, people in motors, people with bicycles, one and all of this eager crowd shouted and waved as though at their wits' end.

'They did not see the danger of it. The airman was off the ground; that was enough for them. But those of us who had seen more of these things watched Loraine's progress with a sinking that increased. He was evidently working like a madman to get the machine to rise; his elevator rose, but his aeroplane did not. Again and again the elevator rose in

fruitless efforts to give the machine greater height. It was always the same. He kept a steady fifteen or twenty feet above the ground, but could not rise farther. And higher land was coming not far ahead. Nor could he descend where he was, for the water-courses and hillocks in the rougher land he had now reached were as dangerous as any alternative danger. There was nothing for it but to keep on while he was safe, and trust to a rise in time. I watched him in horrible fear, while all behind me were yelling with delight and cheering. My glance happened to take in the figure of poor Jules Vedrines who was standing before me, his body contorted and his hands strained together as though by a nightmare. "*Mon Dieu!*" I heard him gasp, and then: "*Il est tombé!*" It was true. 'Jones' had fallen. First his skids snapped, then his chassis crumpled up beneath him like a flattened basket. The propeller struck the earth, snapping off both blades, and the broken chassis came crashing upwards through the under main plane and broke it, canvas and timber alike, in half a dozen places. The tail was not harmed a bit, and the upper main plane escaped except for torn canvas and a bad bend in the front edge.

'Jones was not harmed; I saw him leap forward just as his chassis broke, and skip well clear of the machine. He was walking quietly about when I reached him. He had taken out an old mereschaum pipe, and was puffing away at it with a face that did not twitch. I could not help admiring the man. It was not callousness nor insensibility. It was just downright self-control, for Jones, as I have noticed over and over again, has really the quick nervous temperament of the artist, and it could only be by sheer force of will that he held so brave a front. I waited for him to speak, for I felt for the man. Looking back on it now, I remember that unconsciously I held out my hand. He shook it. "It was the wind," he said quietly, after a pause that lasted for many puffs of his pipe. "It's blowing down the hill, it was on my plane tops. I could feel it pressing and pushing me down, always down." Then he turned and looked at his wrecked machine. He didn't speak for a minute, then half to me and half to himself, he went on:

"I shall have to build a hangar here. Where's a good place?" He turned and looked over the land about him, and stayed his glance at a hayfield, newly mown, two hundred yards away. "That's the spot," he said, "a hangar on that field and I'll patch up there. I'll need my cases from Blackpool and a whole heap else." He was clearly talking to himself by this time. I turned to go, but he stopped me. "Where are you off to?" he said. "How are you getting back to Holyhead? I'll drive you." The man was thinking of me and the remoteness of Bryn Goelcerth from Holyhead, although he had weeks of work and broken hope at his feet. I got into my car and came away to Holyhead as down in the mouth as ever I remember to have been. . . .'

Bryn Goelcerth was to prove Robert's Golgotha.

The morning after the crash he and Smart reviewed the situation. One fact stood out way beyond everything else: his time was short. He was rehearsing for an Autumn production, and could only spend the week-ends in Anglesey. An all-night journey from London on Friday would land him at Llanfairynghornwy for Saturday and Sunday; and Sunday night in the train would take him back to the Haymarket Theatre on Monday. There were only three spare week-ends before production. He must try and get this flight over before the end of August.

Then Smart and he motored out to make an inventory of the damage. Spares had to be obtained from the Farman works at Mourmelons. "The aeroplane lay spread out on the grass, completely dismembered. Her injuries were many, and she would take at least ten days to re-build, said Vedrines—(Smart's journal).

'"It must be done in a week," said Robert firmly.

'"*Impossible*, *tout-à-fait impossible*," expostulated Vedrines, becoming a windmill of waving arms. "The machine must be ready to fly next Saturday," repeated Robert emphatically. We left the little Gascon in a frenzy and walked down to a spot where twenty Welshmen had already erected the skeleton of a hangar——

"Here we were cheered.

"They were a splendid lot, these Welshmen! They had not only produced timber and ropes from Heaven knows where, but they were now working like maniacs. Many of them had been sailors, and the way in which they climbed the baulks and hung on by their feet, whilst they tied knots and hammered in nails with both hands, was an education.

'"Well, Vedrines won't be delayed for lack of a hangar," observed Robert. But we were not to be cheered for long; for, while we were watching, a tall red-haired raw-boned person had approached and began to address us frantically in broken English.

'"Damage—my field—damage. Yes. You must pay me. Yes, indeed," he said.

"Now, Robert works on the excellent principle of paying everything on the nail; all the same, he hates doing it. "What do you mean? Where's the damage?" he inquired, exasperatedly. The field was waste land, half pasture, half bog. "My field damage. You pay me whateffer," repeated the raw-boned personage. "On the contrary," replied Robert stonily, "I ought to charge you for being here. I am doing you an honour."

'"Damage, yes. Damage," continued the gentleman almost hysterically, and addressed the foreman of the works forcibly in Welsh.

'"Surely you are not going to stop for him?" asked Robert, astonished.

"The foreman assumed a judicial expression and, sitting on a swaying beam, regarded us thoughtfully. "I can onlee do what is leegal," he observed finally. "It is his field. We must do what is leegal. Yes—indeed."

"There was nothing more to be said about it. The personage produced a greasy pocket-book, and Robert was obliged to sign his name to an agreement that he would indemnify Mr. Hughes for all damage; such damage to be assessed by two valuers, one appointed by each party. We then hurried back to Holyhead, Robert to catch the next train to London, and I to hunt up carpenters and sailmakers."

Next day Mr. Hughes' Bill came in. It read:

	£	s.	d.
Damage to field by erecting hangar	15	15	0
Damage to field by walking of spectators	5	5	0
Damage to roads by motor-cars	5	5	0
Damage to fences and gates by people	12	0	0
Damage to two stacks of hay used as beds in hangar	8	0	0
Damage to field by alighting of aeroplane	2	0	0
Damage to field by breaking aeroplane	8	0	0
	£56	5	0

N.B.—You will pay this before you leave.

Smart remarks: "There are no roads, no gates, no fences, the aeroplane left no trace when she alighted, but I will have to handle this Methodist farmer carefully, for fear of sabotage.

"Wherever we go, it is the same. We either meet with lavish hospitality or bare-faced robbery. The Admiral of the Port here is kindness itself. I can have any piece of wood or canvas shaped by the Marine yard at top speed and bottom prices. They have already fashioned our propeller. But at Llanfairynghornwy, the very seat of our aeroplane, we have to contend with this farmer.

"Every morning when I call on Vedrines to execute his commissions for the day, the fellow is prowling around. And when Vedrines sorts out broken pieces of wood and metal for me, with the invariable exhortation: '*C'est à copier, exactement, EXACTEMENT*,' his voice rising to a shriek as he hands me a fistful of chips, Mr. Hughes dashes in to see whateffer is going on.

"It is no joke, however, and I have now instructed the lorries delivering spars and canvas to stop two fields away, so that they shall not pass over his property."

The dirty work of dealing with problems might seem to be falling entirely to Smart, whilst Robert flashed down at week-ends for the glory of flying. In large measure this was so—although Robert also dealt with problems when he

arrived. Read the account of the journalist who drove with him from Bryn Goelcerth into Holyhead on the next black and squally week-end.

Says the *North Wales* reporter of the *Liverpool Daily Post*: 'Nothing I had before seen of the man had prepared me for the revelation of volcanic energy displayed by him during my sixteen miles' ride with him to Holyhead.

'The night was pitch black and the road so narrow that the car filled it from side to side. Hills as steep as a roof had to be ascended and descended. The rain came literally in sheets, driving furiously into our faces. A plug failed and the car was stopped in the midst of a deluge. Jones sprang from his snug seat in the centre into the rain and mud, and worked furiously to get things right. Then he tackled the handle in front of the car for the purpose of starting the engine. His gigantic chauffeur asked him to let him do it, but Jones tore and strained, and at last conquered and sprang into the seat by the driver, sending a weather expert into the more sheltered seat behind.

'Then the acetylene headlight went out. Again the car was stopped and again Jones was in the mud and rain at the head of the car adjusting the lamp. Suddenly he stepped to the side of the car. "Stamps," he shouted above the wind. The weather expert handed him out half a dozen twopence-halfpenny stamps. Jones took them and pasted them on the bottom of the acetylene lamp cistern, which was leaking. On we went again, tearing through the night. Suddenly an explosion occurred, but the car flew on for miles through sleeping villages, past silent farmsteads. We were all soaked, Jones more than any one, as he had no topcoat. Then at last we got into the great Holyhead main road at Valley, and soon a clanking and bumping behind told of a burst inner tube.

'Off Jones jumped again, and with the chauffeur got the tyre off and took the inner tube out, reset the tyre without a tube, and then pushed on, reaching his hotel at 9.50 p.m. This was the man who had been supervising alterations to his machine at Bryn Goelcerth since 6 a.m. My last view of him was marching down the corridor to the bathroom for a

hot shower before catching the train to London. On this march he was attended by two sea-captains, an inventor of a device for an undeviating compass, Captain Smart, an accountant, and several fellow-journalists.

'I could not help reflecting that Jones is undoubtedly in every sense of the word—physical, mental and moral—an exceptionally strong man.'

He was—but there was something else as well to account for this nervous ebulition: disaffection in the camp.

It was a toss-up whether Vedrines went or stayed. Little work had been done during the week towards reconstructing the aeroplane, and if the week-end had not passed in a roaring gale, which made flying impossible, Jones might have throttled Vedrines.

Oh, he had cause. One morning when Smart had driven out to the wilderness of Cae'bendu'bryn'goelcerth . . . with a carful of spare parts, he had been surprised to see two women in high heels and dove-grey hobble skirts hovering round the hangar.

"Them's their Madames, the Frenchies' Modoms . . ." explained Gibbs, the chauffeur. "Jules fetched 'em over that time he went to Paris from Blackpool. And a bit of orl right they are, on any road. They can cook, I can tell you."

This, then, was the explanation of that telegram about the scalded children. Smart swallowed his indignation and ignored the Madams. But he warned Vedrines about the work, whereupon Vedrines struck an attitude and, meticulously pointing his moustache, declared: 'I can no more,' and went out for a walk with his Madame.

When Jones heard the tale, he was all for sacking Vedrines. Smart argued for thirty-six hours, showing him that the flight to Ireland could not take place without his mechanic. As a compromise, and by way of upholding some show of authority, Vedrines' brother, Emil, was dismissed.

"*Si mon frère s'en va, je m'en vais,*" said Vedrines and downed tools.

Robert and Smart were aghast, but kept iron fronts. The last words that kept ringing in Robert's ears as he boarded

the night train for London were Vedrines' "*Je m'en vais.*" The flight to Ireland, which had been launched in such high spirits, had developed into an impossible bug bear.

But Fate fought on the side of Jones in the matter of Vedrines and brought the solution unexpectedly. The brothers, so far faithful unto death, attacked each other that night with knives. All because Madame—wife of Emil, charpentier de luxe—said that Emil was obviously more essential to the aeroplane than Jules. Now Jules, as the world knew or would very soon know, was the finest aeroplane mechanic that existed and a budding aviator. It was ridiculous to talk like that. And when Madame persisted, Jules seized the carving-knife to emphasize his point, and Emil took the bread knife to defend himself, and they were only separated in time by the entrance of the huge Welsh farmer with whom they boarded—who held them off on either side like rats.

Next morning, Vedrines sent a farmhand into Holyhead with a note begging Smart to send the car to Llanfairynghornwy. Fearing the worst, Smart nevertheless complied, and was unutterably relieved when Vedrines presented himself three hours later with: "*Bonjour le patron. Mon frère est parti. Je reste. Je suis fidèle. L'avion avant tout.*" He found himself dancing a jig, shaking hands round and round the room with the mechanic. "*Ma femme reste pour me tenir compagnie,*" said Vedrines. And Smart knew enough of the barren steppes and outlandish solitude of Cae'bendu'bryn'goelcerth llanfairynghornwy, to agree that this was wise.

The fight had cleared the air. Vedrines worked with renewed vigour, jumping round the machine all by himself, except when Madame left her knitting to come and hold the end of a length of *fil de fer.* With Madame as his mate the biplane was ready in two days.

It was a new biplane for the second time. All that remained of the original Farman was the Gnome engine, and that had been continually refitted—and the design. Even the design had been slightly modified, under telegraphic instructions from Farman at Mourmelons, to take a four-hour petrol tank. Many were the cross-braces to strengthen and adjust the balance, that this

had required. But there she was, finished; even to the coat of varnish on the planes. All that was needed now was fine weather.

It was intended to fly her straight from Bryn Goelcerth field to Dublin, instead of descending to re-fuel at Salt Island. The tugs had been cancelled. Jones was to fly without them, by the aid of a compass that was floated in glycerine, in a container specially swivelled in a wooden case that was to be strapped to his knee. His own elastic muscles would thus be acting as shock and vibration absorbers, and the compass would keep true. Moreover, a white line had been painted over the glass lid in such a way that he had only to keep that line over North to maintain his right course for Dublin. The gadget was ingenious and had not yet been tried.

August was over before there was a fine week-end. But on Sunday, September 4th, the day broke smiling. There was an eighteen to twenty mile easterly wind blowing across the Irish Channel—an advantage—and at Bryn Goelcerth Hollow there was absolute calm. It was the ideal moment, and the best course had been marked out over the difficult ground. Jones was to hold the machine down as long as possible to gain impetus and then sky-rocket her over the basin-side of the hills.

At last, at last . . . the long wait for this flight had told on every one's nerves.

Farmhands and shepherds had come to the spot again to see the great bird go up. Jones was in his seat with the compass strapped above his left knee, Vedrines had given a farewell pat to the planes before he stood back. The engine revved and roared; without more ado Jones's hand fell, and she was let go . . .

Almost immediately there was a *detonation* . . . the machine never rose, and this time Jones's legs were pinned under the boom of the lower main plane which was carrying the full weight of the engine, as the centre section of the Farman collapsed through on to the turf. Luckily, the engine stopped and there was no fire.

It was one of those miraculous, incredible escapes: when

six men had combined to raise the boom, Jones was dragged out from underneath with nothing worse than a pair of badly-bruised, badly-sprained legs. He could not stand on them, but they were with him still.

This time the accident had been due to *bog*. The field was reclaimed ground. The very fact of holding the plane down had made her wheels cut below the thin, hard surface into ooze. The strain set up by this sucking ooze had ripped away the undercarriage, "as if a scythe," says Smart, "had shorn away her feet." Strange that no one had ever noticed there was bog beneath that ground.

The luck in that pudding-basin hollow in the hills was devilish. Here, Fate was against Jones.

After being carried round the machine so as to verify the extent of the damage himself, he was bathed and bandaged by a doctor who happened to be present in the crowd. Then he was placed in the tonneau of the car. Smart got in beside him. Not a word was spoken by either of them for a long time as they switched back over the hills to Holyhead. The outlook seemed desperate. There was one more week-end before the production of *The Man From The Sea* would keep Loraine from playing Jones. But Jones was in pain, and ready as he always was to incur pain, he was by no means a patient sufferer. He was already wondering how Loraine would rehearse. The opening of the play would have to be postponed. Here he was, laid out by a stupid injury on top of a landslide of expense and delays; and the machine was broken up again.

No other aviator had leaped forward to take advantage of his four weeks hold-up and slip across to Ireland. They had considered the risks involved too great. Was he merely being a fool? Was it worth going on? Was it meant to be?

"I'll have to chuck it, won't I?" he said to Smart.

And little Smart, whose life had been one long defeat—in spite of his handicap at golf, his fast riding to hounds, and the Dervish at Omdurman—patient, hardworking, overlooked Smart, came forward with brains and hope.

"There's a field at Penrhos Park, right on the water," he murmured softly. "Lord Sheffield would let us rig up a hangar

there. I'll bring the biplane in by road—Vedrines will fit her up. Anyhow, there'll be no trouble about getting off the ground from there, and once you are off—you'll be right out to sea. I—I don't like the idea of you being beaten, old man."

"By jove, you're right," said Robert. "I must have one more crack at it. And perhaps," he added dubiously, "these feet will bring me luck. Blériot wasn't able to walk when he flew from Sangatte. I believe—it may be—an omen."

CHAPTER X

"I'LL CONCENTRATE on one word all the time I'm flying." Robert assured Smart the following Sunday, at breakfast in the banqueting hall at Penrhos Park. "*Danger.* That'll keep me alert."

Smart was distressed because there would be next to no shipping in the Irish Channel on Sunday, and Robert was determined to start. Wind and weather were propitious; it was a blue and white day, clear and cold for the time of year, with large patches of swiftly-sailing cotton-wool cloud. The machine—almost completely rebuilt for the third time—had been tested; Robert had flown her twice round the harbour at dawn and pronounced her *perfect.* "*C'est vrai, elle marche très bien,*" echoed Vedrines, who had been watching, and thereupon burst into tears, utterly overstrung by the week's hard work. It had been a fearfully packed week for every one; every second had been crammed to the limit, and to-day was the last chance.

"Let's make it," said Robert, and donned two sweaters, a padded waistcoat, and a patent jacket made of reindeer hair, which was warranted to keep him afloat for five days. He looked like an Arctic explorer when they were all on. As Smart and Vedrines were strapping him into the reindeer jacket, Admiral Leslie Burr, the Admiral of the Port, rushed up, greatly concerned. 'There was not a ship of any kind in the harbour that could put out into the Channel except his own launch and that only had a radius of ten miles,' he said. 'Robert must wait.'

"Can't," said Robert, "it would be the height of unwisdom. At the moment the wind is favourable, due East, but it's rising, and it may veer." As a further concession, he called for his cork lifebelt which was put over all—and very nearly drowned him later—while Smart tied an immense whistle round his neck, which he could blow if he fell into the water. They were all so tense and anxious that the idea of Jones

drifting round in the Irish Sea, blowing a whistle, struck none of them as funny.

Smart would have liked a priest to bless the new, white wings of the aeroplane as they glistened in the sun, but the clergy were all at church. The servants and tenants of Penrhos Park stood by, holding their prayer-books, on their way to Matins.

As journalists had been informed the week before that the flight to Ireland had been abandoned, there was only an intimate circle of friends to cheer the departure.

Vedrines was at the engine, shouting to Robert: "*Méfiez-vous, c'est tout du fil de fer Anglais. Pourvue que çà tienne.*" (Be on your guard, it has all been repaired with English wire. I hope it holds.) The Admiral shook Robert's leg in farewell, it was all he could reach once Robert was in his seat. Smart—for once without a hat, his eyes watering under the contrary emotions of excitement and unbearable responsibility, had gone forward with a flag to mark where the ground fell away from the level. Of a sudden the machine buzzed fiercely down towards him, and just where he stood, parted from its shadow into the sky.

Even as they watched, almost before they had time to think, it was swallowed into space.

Jones had gone.

Instead of the roar of his engine, church bells floated peacefully into the sky.

"Concentrating my mind on a blank, for fear of my imagination," writes Smart, "I took Vedrines by the arm and we made our way into Holyhead. Very curious it was to see the townsfolk standing in little knots at the corners of the streets, peering up and whispering. Many thought that 'Jones' was flying in the face of Providence by breaking the Sabbath.

"I moved about in a kind of waking dream. What if the compass didn't work, and he went charging up and down the length of the Irish Sea? There was only that compass to guide him once he was out of sight of land.

"The Admiral and various other sympathisers gave me lunch at the hotel, and at 2 o'clock Vedrines and his wife and

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I boarded the Irish Mail-boat. The Admiral made up a party and boarded it, too. He proposed to entertain Robert to a banquet in Dublin that evening. There was no news as yet, but, anticipating success, I had packed a bag with Jones's evening clothes.

"I kept hold of this bag as though it would bring me into touch with him.

"Vedrines and I were introduced to the Captain of the ship, and were allowed to sit on the bridge. Half-way across we sighted the Butter-boat, and immediately altered our course to speak to it.

"As we neared her, the Captain and Chief Officer had a heated argument as to which flags would signify aviator, and finally hoisted the question: "Have you seen Air Man?"[1] So that there might be no mistake, the Chief hung over the taffrail with a megaphone and bawled as we came abreast: "Have you seen Jones?"

'"Yes . . . Yes . . . The Kish. Hurrah. Hurrah," came the reply from men waving caps on the Butter-boat. Then, everybody on both ships started to cheer at once and continued to cheer until the Butter-boat was almost out of sight. Vedrines rushed down the gangway and harangued the sympathetic passengers in French. The mist that had been before my eyes cleared. I didn't know what I felt beyond—overwhelming gratitude. Thank God he was safe.

"The Kish is a lightship six miles from Dublin Bay. The compass therefore had worked perfectly. From the Kish he could see land, and all danger was over. The rest of our passage was a triumphal procession. Every one congratulated Vedrines and me, and we were shown over the engines of the ship. The Admiral and I were speculating with excitement over the place of Jones's descent, the Golf links or Phœnix Park, we imagined; but Phœnix Park was where we hoped to find him, for that would mean the completest victory."

They did not find him at Phœnix Park, nor anywhere they expected. Their mortification on hearing he had tumbled

[1]This was very probably the first time the word was used.

into the sea just off Howth Head was intense, but their relief to find him safe on a cargo ship, beyond words.

"He was sitting on the edge of the bunk in the skipper's cabin, wearing a sailor's blue trousers and a blue jersey, with S. S. *Adela*, embroidered across the chest," records Smart.

"I would give anything to recount his Flight in French as he told it to me and Vedrines, but even I cannot cope with Robert's French, so the English is as near as possible to his own words:

'"The Easterly wind," he began, "almost doubled my land-speed, and I was full of buck at having got the Flight started—you know, Smart, it's been hanging over us for a month—well, just beyond Holyhead mountain, I passed the incoming mail-boat and, getting into the line of its wake, verified the relative positions of the sun and my compass needle. Then I made up my mind to an hour and a half of loneliness.

'"All the time, mind you, I was mounting, until I must have been 4,000 feet up, and it was a mighty good thing I was, too, for without any warning the engine stopped!"

'"Good Lord," I exclaimed.

'"*C'est impossible*," objected Vedrines, aggravatingly.

'"But it did," insisted Robert, "and we started diving down to the sea. I never felt so sick in my life, but I hadn't much time to think, for the sea was rushing up towards me. I remembered it would be quite as hard to strike as asphalte, and I couldn't think how I was going to escape, but all the time I was juggling with the petrol supply like mad, opening the robinet a notch or two, and then closing it in case she choked. All of a sudden when I was twenty feet above the water, the engine spluttered and started firing again. I had her straight in a jiffy, and flew her straight for some distance, and then commenced to climb." He broke off and looked at Vedrines: "Now what on earth can have caused that?" he asked.

"Vedrines sat silent with beetling brows for a full minute. Then he gave the solution. The big petrol tank had lately been opened to be fitted with baffle plates, perhaps a little pellet of

solder had been left in it. This would roll back and close the feed pipe when the machine was tilted upwards, and would roll away when the glide became steep and the machine tilted downwards. This sounded reasonable, so Robert went on.

'"Five times that happened," he said. "Five times I went through the same performance, juggling with the robinet, giving up hope and just being saved by the engine starting in time, except that I never dropped quite so low as I did the first time."

'"How frightful," I cried, for the flight was surely trying enough without these descents.

'"Oh, I don't know, it kept me warm, and pretty cold, too," observed Robert cheerily. "It was lucky that each time it happened I was fairly high up. Between whiles I set my course, keeping my eyes glued to the compass on my knee, and feeling a bit desolate. There was nothing to be seen except blue sky and blue sea. No ship did I sight for over fifty minutes, there was nothing to tell me I was steering right except the sun, which only gave me a rough idea. As I climbed after the fifth fall I recalled the saying of the pitcher that goes too often to the well for water, and—oh, my dear fellow—could just hear myself blowing your police whistle up and down in the empty sea.

'"Then, half-way across I ran into a squall of rain which gave me all I could do to keep the machine balanced. At last, I looked at my watch and saw I had been up an hour, and grew very nervous. If I was on my right course, I must be half-way across I thought, and at the altitude I was, I ought to see land.

'"But there was nothing, absolutely nothing. Sea and sky seemed to join each other without any horizon. I know now, there must have been a lot of haze to obscure the land, for all of a sudden, about two minutes later, I saw a light-ship immediately beneath me. It burst quite suddenly on my vision and I was vastly surprised as I realised it was the Kish and that I had made a dead landfall, and the compass had worked splendidly, I nearly threw up my hands and cheered for I was only six miles off shore. Just beyond the Kish was a steamer going towards Holyhead——

'"Yes, the Butter-boat," we cried.

'"I could see the steam blowing from her syren," he continued, "so I knew she had sighted me, and for the next three minutes I thought I was going to succeed. I can't tell you the exaltation I was in. I looked at my watch and saw it was a quarter-past twelve. So I had done the sixty-four miles in an hour and ten minutes, record going for a record crossing—my pulses danced, the blood throbbed in my ears. Then something happened . . . But I don't know what it was," he said mournfully. "All I know is that she began to plunge and dip in the most alarming fashion. Now she would rear up, now she would dive, then she would heel over to the left, and then to the right. There was nothing for it but to go on. For at least two minutes we went along heeled over to the right at an angle of 45 degrees. I was certain we were going to slip down sideways, but I got the lever in my left hand and pulled it over as far as it would go, and at last she came up again. I never had such a tussle. I was sweating all over in spite of being terribly cold. All the while we were losing altitude fast, and very soon after the trouble began, I saw I was down to some 500 feet. Then I caught a glimpse of the Head (Howth Head) away to my right, and I can tell you I was thankful to see it.

'"It was a terrible job turning her round towards it, but eventually she answered the rudder and we continued our diving and tumbling, losing height in the most alarming fashion. By the time we were within a hundred yards of the Head, we were down to 100 feet, tossing about worse than ever. There was only one chance. If I could climb another 50 feet, I might just manage to land beyond the edge of the lower cliff. The way to do this was to turn her into the wind, and trust to her coming up against it.

'"I put her over.

'"For some awful moments I thought she would not take it, but finally she swung round. I had one instant of hope, then something else went."

'" *C'est le petit cellule, le petit cellule*," cried Vedrines anguished (The small tail-plane, the small tail-plane.) " *C'est le fil de fer Anglais, c'est*——" (It's the English wire.)

'"Whatever it was," interrupted Robert, "we plunged straight into the sea."

'"*Pas de chance, pas de chance*," groaned Vedrines, weeping.

'"D'you know, my dear fellow," Robert continued, "it was much softer than I thought it would be.

'"I dived as deep as I could to clear the wires, but it was ages before I came to the surface. The fact is that the old cork lifebelt brought my legs up and kept my head underneath. It must have got worked up my chest, or something. Anyway, fighting against it wasn't the least of my troubles. When at last I came up, I found I was just outside the machine, so I struck out to avoid being caught by the end of her planes. As I did so, she turned slowly over on to her back, and sank as far as her lower plane and then floated with her two wheels and skids in the air, like a dead wild duck. It was pathetic.

'"I made for the lighthouse and the shore cursing myself all the time for having put on so many clothes. I could scarcely swim at all, and if I stopped striking out hard, I turned turtle. I can tell you it was no joke. When I was within 50 yards of the rocks I saw the lighthouse man removing his coat and waistcoat obviously with the intention of saving me. Naturally, I didn't want to be saved, the best I could do now, was to get ashore unaided.

'"But, do you know, I had the greatest difficulty in preventing that fellow from rescuing me. I had to tread water and swear at him, and whenever I paused to do this, I turned turtle. So that he was more than ever determined to save me. But at last I got away from him and found a place and climbed up the rocks *and nobody helped me.*

'"At least I had reached Ireland on my machine and by myself. But oh, when I steamed up the Liffey on this little cargo-boat, which came up to salve the biplane, I could have cried. Here was I grunting into Dublin, when, with only two miles more I could have been soaring over it, as I had always dreamed."

So ended Jones's Flight to Ireland—a world record. The remains of the wrecked Farman were thrown into a packing-case and dispatched to Hendon. This time it was not re-

assembled. It was cheaper to buy two new biplanes, which he did.

A couple of days later Jones went back to Loraine, and Robert Loraine opened in *The Man From The Sea*, in London. Many were the reports that his flight and fall into the sea off Howth Head had been all a publicity stunt for the play. In spite of such sensational publicity, the play failed.

The Royal Aero Club presented Jones, or Robert Loraine, as they called him, with a silver medal that was specially struck to commemorate the deed. Sir Herbert Tree gave him a magnificent silver statuette representing the marriage of Art and Aviation, on behalf of the Green Room Club, and the stage. It was inscribed with the motto *Sic itur ad Astra.* The motto of the unborn Air Force was to be *Per Ardua ad Astra.* The first means: By this road to the stars; the second: By labour to the stars.

At the De Forest contest in December, Jones had bad luck. Both his biplanes were destroyed; one by a hangar falling on it, the other by an engine explosion. But he created another sensation before this. He was the first man to send a wireless message from the air. This was done an a Bristol biplane when passing over Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain.

The experiments were being carried out on Salisbury Plain; Robert's sense of the dramatic caused him to send the message while passing over Stonehenge, to try and associate England's most ancient monument with her latest form of progress.

After that, Vedrines, who had made sufficient money in his service as a mechanic, left him to enter the Blériot School and become an aviator. The little Gascon was to be the first airman to cross the Pyrenees and win the race from Paris to Madrid. He brought the Gordon Bennett Cup back to France from America, and was the first to show flying in Egypt. *Sic itur ad astra.* He, too, was carving the way.

When all his machines had been wrecked, Robert turned his full attention once more to acting. At one moment, again, it seemed as if he might be drawn back into flying. Sun Yat Sen, the great Chinese revolutionary, called on him at the theatre and discussed for hours on end the formation of a

Chinese Flying Corps under Robert. There is no doubt that had Sun's finances been as clear and definite as his vision, Robert would have gone with him. For his heart was in aviation. But they were not. The great Chinaman had little money. And it had now become imperative for Robert to make money. The £40,000 he had made from *Man and Superman* had all been spent. It had vanished literally in the air, leaving a memory of flights never to be repeated, of golden days never to be recaptured, in a Summer, which, "for all its trials," says Smart, "was a shimmer of jubiliation."

Sic itur ad astra.

PART THREE

In the first Air-War: and after

July 28, 1914.

Offered services to Admiralty—Royal Naval Air Service—in case of war.

July 29.

No reply from Admiralty.

July 30th.

Sent wire to Admiralty, repeating offer of 28th.

August 1.

No reply from Admiralty.

These are the terse headings in Robert's diary. For three days more he wondered with the rest of England whether there was going to be war. If all men were bewildered, some were also elated, and it is no use hiding the fact that Robert's spirit leapt to action. He was elated.

What had the years between 1910 and 1914 brought forth? several managerial ventures, notably a revival of *Man and Superman* at the Criterion, with Pauline Chase and Gladys Cooper—two musical-comedy stars—as Anne and Violet. The casting of a musical comedy star for Anne was not altogether successful. For although Robert had meant Anne to be played as any little woman chasing her man, the fact remains that Anne, like most of Shaw's women, is super-charged, and requires playing by an intellectual actress.

He, however, again played Tanner with the greatest artistic and financial success. To quote the Press: "His success was immediate, emphatic, continuous."

Next, he presented a play called *98·9* in which the production—self-financed—cost £7,000. The production was rather a feature of the play, and he made it a double-feature by having real Dresden china and Museum Persian rugs, finest Chinese lacquer, and the most astonishing mechanical toys that could be obtained for the Nursery Scene of the play: all of which culminated in a really smashing flop. There was no way of

meeting this failure, except by selling his car and luxuriously appointed home at 51 Conduit Street—a place that was minute but exquisite—and setting off to Canada, where he toured for two years with *Man and Superman*, alternated by way of contrast with *The Cradle-Snatcher*.

Women had also entered into his life rather more than usual. He had been engaged to Marie Löhr, with whom he had fallen in love when he played with her in Maugham's *Smith* and Shaw's *Getting Married*. "She was the youngest thing I'd ever seen, or have ever seen since," he said. "So gay and entrancingly lovely." She remained for him the embodiment of youth to the end of his days, and yet—at the time—when it came to a question of giving up Marie Löhr or flying, it was the engagement that was broken. As Smart says: "His attitude to women was a curious mixture of Western sentimentality and Eastern despotism. He placed them on a pedestal, but they were not to inconvenience him or criticise his pursuits."

Perhaps it was people outside who broke up the engagement. Marie Löhr's mother definitely disapproved of aviation and the money that went in flying-machines. Shaw thought that there was too great a physical resemblance between Marie and Robert for the eugenically-perfect match. He placed their photos side by side and declared they might be brother and sister: as husband and wife the match would amount to incest.

So Robert fitted an extra-large arc-lamp above the driver's seat to his Austro-Daimler car, and charged about the country at 80 and 90 miles an hour every night after the theatre, for several weeks after the marriage was 'off'; he also flew, and when his flying was over, settled down to mend his fortunes on the stage.

But, as he had been accused of being self-centred, he adopted a French girl from among the small-part actresses who had applied to him for a job, made her his ward, and had her voice trained for Grand Opera. "I must be interested in some career besides my own," he explained to Smart.

Poor Robert, for four years he bore the expenses incurred by those who have their voices trained for Grand Opera; a

diversion that cost fully three times as much as his own living.

At the outbreak of War he had just returned from Canada and was enjoying a success in *The Tyranny of Tears* at the Haymarket Theatre. He was bored with the vicissitudes which beset his ward in Grand Opera; he was looking for an acting version of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the rights of which he had acquired from Sir Charles Wyndham in 1910.[1] He had insufficient money to cut a dash and do as he pleased; yet he had enough to make poverty unexciting; he was in one of his restless moods of dissatisfaction, when the German invasion of Belgium, with its consequent menace to England supplied the best possible reason for existing.

The diary continues:

August 2nd.

Called personally, and offered services to Admiralty. They could give no definite reply. Offered services through Aero Club to War Office.

August 3.

Received telegram from War Office asking would I accept commission in Royal Flying Corps Special Reserve. Replied Yes.

August 4.

WAR DECLARED.

August 5.

Answer from Admiralty offering me higher commission in the Royal Naval Air Service than the one I have accepted in the Royal Flying Corps.

August 12th.

Joined Royal Flying Corps at Farnborough.

. . . . . .

No doubt he could have transferred and accepted the higher commission from the Admiralty, but there was something very appealing about the minute Flying Corps. Eleven machines had gone over to France with the British Expeditionary Force: *on probation.* The utility of aeroplanes in the Field was doubted by every Head at the War Office, excepting Kitchener. Twelve

[1]These rights were obtained while he was in London during the week from Cae'bendu'bryn'goelcerthllanfairynghornwy.

machines had taken off the tarmac at Farnborough to go to France. But one had stalled—fallen backwards—on rising, killing both pilot and observer. Skene, the pilot of this machine was very skilled, one of the few men in the country who had looped the loop; which was why he had taken the most difficult plane to handle. Machines in the Royal Flying Corps were still very primitive. There were the same old Blériots on which Robert had learnt to fly four years before, excepting that these Blériots were equipped with 70 and 80 horse-power engines now as against the previous 25 h.p. There were Henri Farmans—similar to the one that had belonged to 'Jones'—but with the pilot's seat boxed in. Aeroplanes had only reached a slightly later stage of development.

Major Trenchard[1] was in command of Farnborough, the Headquarters of the Royal Flying Corps and training centre for the Special Reserve of Officers who *might be required* to supplement the probationary force. Robert had flown the Irish Channel before Trenchard had ever been in the air; he arrived at Farnborough with a big reputation as a Pioneer.

He crashed two aeroplanes on landing from his first two flights.

This would have been all right had there been a Vedrines at Farnborough, but there was no such mechanical genius. Moreover, the entire Flying Corps boasted little more than thirty serviceable flying machines. There were fifty listed but they were not all in flying order: about eight were at Farnborough. These machines also all came from France, where the factories were working day and night to supply the French Army. Obviously planes could not be piled up like that—the Pioneer was told he could not fly.

Says Air-Marshal Sir Sefton Brancker in his *Memoirs*:

"Trenchard saddled me with the unpleasant task of telling Loraine that he couldn't be allowed to fly any more because he had damaged two of our all too precious machines. He was broken-hearted at this decision, but his enthusiasm and keenness were such that I sent him out to France as an observer."

To France, as an observer went Robert on September 2nd,

[1]Later Marshal of the Air: Lord Trenchard, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O.

after leaving his personal luggage at the Purves-Stewarts. (Sir James Purves-Stewart had a beautiful Adam house in Harley Street, and Robert, as usual, had sold up!) The manner of his departure is worth recording from his diary.

September 2.

"Lunched alone at Waterloo Station and took train leaving at 2.10 p.m. for Southampton. Reported to Embarkation Officer, and was shown telegram from War Office, saying: 'Havre dangerous. No officers or troops to be sent there.' Told to report again at 6.30 p.m.

"Met Fulton who had just arrived from Farnborough in his Daimler car. Fulton offered me seat in his car so that we might proceed together on landing in France to Aircraft Headquarters. But on reporting to Embarkation Officer, I found that instructions were for Fulton and car to cross to Havre at 4 a.m., while I was to leave on first transport. (Note: Fulton was a Major, Robert a 2nd Lieutenant.)

"Much chagrined, and being certain I would reach Flying Corps quicker with Fulton, I *bought a ticket* and left with Fulton on passenger-ship *Alberta.*

"We were the only soldiers on board, most passengers being French reservists who were going to join up, and Americans taking ship for U.S.A., at Havre.

"Have had curious impression ever since leaving Waterloo of going to War alone, instead of the usual business of marching and embarking with a regiment. No bands this time, no flags.

September 3.

"Entered harbour at Le Havre about 11 a.m. Owing to U.S.S. *Tennesee* taking berth, the *Alberta* could not get a quay berth, and we had to wait for a floating crane to take off the car. This took all day.

"Leaving the town at 6.30 p.m., we drove along the road to Quillebœuf, and were challenged by French pickets and sentries of forty and upwards, evidently the last reserve. On our replying Anglais to each challenge, we were called Amis et Frères and our hands were warmly gripped. We were asked

to show a ' laisser passer,' but not having one, were allowed to proceed to the village of ———, where the picket took us to the house of the Maire who gave us a laisser passer. His wife was an English woman and the eldest daughter spoke English perfectly. They were terribly afraid of the Germans coming and were preparing to leave.

"As we proceeded farther into France, demonstrations for the English grew more and more enthusiastic.

"At Quillebœuf we reached the right bank of the Seine and had to wait an hour and a half for the '*bac* to come over and ferry the car across. During this time seven steam-boats passed down loaded with British troops while the entire village population of old men, women and children stood on the river-side shouting Vive Les Anglais, Vive l'Angleterre, although it was 9 p.m. and quite dark. These shouts were very genuine and moving, and as we crossed, they rang out again, rending the evening air, making Fulton and I feel we really had come over to save the country. Our reception was so embarrassing that we drove straight on through this village, where we had intended spending the night.

"We arrived at Pont Andemers very late. Dinner was specially prepared for us by the hostess of the Lion d'or, who insisted on opening a bottle of the Family Burgundy, in which she joined. We drank to *Succés à nos Armées.*

"Fulton slept in a room vacated by the hostess. I, in a bicycle shop.

September 4.

"Rose 5 a.m. Arrived at Le Mans late that afternoon, found the old Flying Ground, which is the advanced base of the R.F.C. Captain Beatty in charge, Cholmondely with him. Bivouacked. British Expeditionary Force has been retreating steadily ever since commencing operations at Mauberge. But no one is downhearted.

(Note: This was the retreat from Mons, which had come to the stand round Paris.)

September 5.

"Rose 4.30 a.m., and asked Beatty who was proceeding by car to give me a lift to *Mélun*, to Royal Flying Corps in the Field.

"Met streams of refugees proceeding South West and feared our forces were routed. Later, when Royal Flying Corps' Motor Transport also passed us going South-West, we expected to hear very bad news. But at Mélun, Beatty jumped out and asked a passing Staff Officer how things were going, and he said: "All going well," to our intense relief.

"Breakfasted at Hotel Grand Monarque. Saw Maurice Baring.

"Reported to General Henderson[1] who was very pleasant. Colonel Sykes[2] appointed me to Squadron 3 under Major Salmond.[3]

"Dined Hotel Commerce. Could not find the right girls' school where Squadron 3 was billeted, so slept on Floor at Grand Monarque.

Sunday, September 6.

"To R.F.C. Camp at 7 a.m. Taube[4] over aerodrome. Two B.E.'s rose at once and chased Taube, which disappeared into clouds at 7,000 feet.

"Enemy 'planes climb higher and are generally faster than ours. But their pilots do not like to risk their machines in a fight. Our men carry steel darts to throw at the German pilots, but cannot get anywhere near them. The Squadron (No. 3) never arrive at a new flying ground but they are flown over within the hour by an Aviatik or Taube. German Air Force must be serving their side well.

"During the day, Conran came down from reconnaissance with the report that the enemy had been defeated at a village south of Meaux and were in full retreat. 'running like the devil,' said he.

Monday 7.

"Moved to *Pézarches.* First move FORWARD since fighting began. Great delight at moving in the right direction.

(Note: This was the Battle of the Marne. Robert was in it,

[1]Lieut.-General Sir David Henderson, K.C.B., D.S.O., in command of R.F.C. in the Field.

[2]Later, Major-General Sir Frederic Sykes, K.C.B., Chief of the Air Staff.

[3]Later, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Geoffrey Salmond, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O.

[4]Taube, German airplane, so called because it had dove-shaped wings.

but not of it. Whatever his impatience may have been to go up and have a look—and who could know of the retreat and not wish to see all that was happening—he was kept on the ground discharging other duties.)

The diary continues:

"Moutray-Read and I went to buy carrots for the mess at Château of the Marquis de Mun. The Marquis complained of state of château caused by British troops, Scots Fusiliers and Artillery under General Shaw. We inspected Château and thought Marquis's complaint unwarranted.

"Accepted wine from the Marquis.

"Germans had been at Pézarches day before. The dead were still lying about the sides of the streets. Bivouacked on ground the enemy had occupied the previous night.

Wednesday 9.

"Moved to *Coulommiers.* Von Klück said to be on the run. Great hopes.

"Dying to see it all from the air, but only observers who know the country are sent up. Have been kept below as orderly officer, and studying maps.

"Bivouacked.

(Note: Many were the longings he had at this time for his old Farman biplane and money. Had he had these, he might have added another machine to the Flying Corps and dived into this War as a free-lance. Then, who could have kept him out of the air!)

Friday 11.

"Poel and I were ordered to find landing-ground and next day's Headquarters at Marigny.

"Made mistake of memory and went in error to Montigny. Thence to General Poulteney, 3rd Army, at Loges-aux-Bœufs. Realised mistake and went to Marigny.

"Pouring with rain. Roads blocked with guns, troops and transport. Hundreds of prisoners; either German units cut off or stragglers who had lost their columns. Some fought to the end, even when surrounded and forgotten five miles to the rear of the Allied advance. At Nanteuil, were warned that Germans in a wood to the side had just killed a peasant woman. Pro-

ceeded after reporting to officer commanding ammunition column.

"Dead horses thicker than yesterday. Graves by roadside. 3rd Army in pursuit looking tired by cheery. Bridge at Ferte destroyed, crossed by pontoon back to Coulommiers.

Saturday 12.

"Moved to *Fère-en Tardenois.* Arrived at Fère in heavy rainstorm. No dinner at camp because of rain. So Christie,[1] Jackson and I went to Zig-zag-um. Made tea and had bully beef at Zig-zag-um. Slept on floor of a school.

"Terrific artillery fire on both sides, which seems odd when neither can see what they are firing at.

"More killed horses, more graves. Ran into Devons skirmishing.

Sunday, September 13.

"Goss called us at 4 a.m. because of a tremendous gale. On arriving at camp, found eight machines had been blown over during the night and smashed. But for the action of sentries, who wrenched down tent-hangars, which were acting as balloons, bellying up and taking the machines with them, every plane would have been destroyed, and British Air Force temporarily out of action.

"When we arrived, machines were standing exposed, closely packed in a field. Officers and men were working frantically to peg planes down and cover the engines with tarpaulin, in slashing rain and squalls. Every gust would lift some machine into the air, falling, it fouled its neighbour and that one the next, so that the whole line was continually in confusion and in danger of being wrecked. Charlton's[2] Blériot was blown straight up on its tail, where it stayed poised for several seconds, and then fell backwards, smashing both wings.

[1]Later, Colonel Archibald Christie, C.M.G., D.S.O.

[2]In 1918 Captain Charlton was Brigadier-General L. E. O. Charlton, D.S.O., commanding a Brigade R.A.F. in France. He and Lieut. Conran (later Lieut.-Col. Conran) were responsible for bringing in the information on August 24th, 1914, which led to the order for the great Retreat from Mons. They were on reconnaissance when they 'spotted' the German enveloping movements at Peruwelz and Charleroi. Had these enemy movements succeeded, instead of being outmanœuvred by the retreat, the British Army would have been decimated.

It was due to this information that the Royal Flying Corps graduated from being a force on probation to its place as the 'eyes of the Army.'

"Salmond dashed out from between two haystacks, where he had been working on maps, and shoved and pushed with the rest of us.

"Six hours later went with Major Salmond to Muret. (? name in diary unreadable.)

"*Did my first reconnaissance.*

"Machine a B.E. Pilot Lewis.[1] Duration: one hour and thirty minutes. Went through heavy rifle-fire at Filain Wood. Found fourteen bullet holes in the machine after landing, two of them within a foot of my head. Archie greeted us on east of the enemy's position. (Archie: Anti-aircraft shell.) Soissons in flames. Heavy artillery fire on both sides.

"Could scarcely recover from my excitement.

"Most spectacular, although troops looked like ants and white puffs from shells bursting in a line made it seem like a toy battle. Even rifle-fire that spattered against wings of our plane was unreal, and the anti-aircraft shells that burst with a dull flash and cough, rocking the plane, were the most completely unreal of all.

"Lunched at Château with General Staff, 2nd Army Corps, General Smith-Dorrien. Noisy billet. (Note: Meaning under continuous shell-fire. The exposed position of G.H.Q. in one of the towers of that Château, was a frequent topic of reminiscence later, among surviving 1914ers.)

. . . . . .

At this date the Armies were engaged in the Battle of the Aisne. Instead of the German retreat turning into a rout as had been expected, the enemy had fallen back into well-prepared positions beyond the Aisne. Or, if these positions had not already been prepared, they were miraculously fortified, overnight, by dint of non-stop labour.

Indeed, what chiefly impressed and mystified Robert during the whole war, was the way in which the enemy settled down into the earth beyond the Aisne. While Robert was still at Fère-en-Tardenois he went up on his second reconnaissance

[1]Pilot-Captain Lewis, R.E., rose to be Lieut.-Col., and was killed in 1917. He was noted for going down very low over the enemy. A brother-officer once wrote in his diary: "Lewis, R.E., has just come in from 'spotting,' with his machine shot full of holes. I believe he likes it."

with Lieut. Pretyman,[1] and, where the enemy were supposed to be, saw nothing but bare ground. Very odd this vacancy appeared compared to the ant-heap activity which had swarmed over the surface four days before.

Thursday, September 17th.

"After lunch went on my third reconnaissance with Pretyman," says the diary, "1 hour and 45 minutes. *Could see no signs of the Germans.* Observed our troops advancing. Chased an Aviatic. *But there was not a glimmer of the Boche.* Could not even locate position of their heavy guns, although their shells could be seen bursting over our lines fairly frequently. From above there seems to be nothing to stop our advance."

But G.H.Q. had every reason to know the troops could not go forward and that the Germans were there. The question was: where exactly was Herr Boche?

In those days British reconnaissance planes crossed the line at a height of anything from 2,000 to 6,000 feet. It was not known then that the best way of discerning trenches from the air was to photograph ground from a height. Aerial photography had not yet been started; although experiments were being made with it in England. At the Front, reconnaissances were carried out by means of the pilot circling round key-points, while the observer hung over the side of the crazy canoe which held them both—very different to the snug cockpit of later days—and thrust his eyes down a pair of binoculars to pick up what he could.

Should an enemy plane interfere with their reconnaissance, which was very rare—the observer stood up in his hazardous canoe, and took pot shots at the Hun with his rifle. Or he threw steel darts, or bombs, which were the size and shape of champagne bottles. It was all very primitive and venturesome, and, according to Robert, a great lark. He remarked to Pretyman, on the third reconnaissance, how grateful they should be for being safely out of the way in an aeroplane instead of wallowing in the mud under bursting shells, like the ground troops. Pretyman said how grateful ground troops were to be safe in a ditch instead of swinging up in the air in

[1]Later a Lieut.-Col. on the Staff.

a "bird-cage." Bird-cage was the Tommies favourite name for an aeroplane, and he shot at bird-cages vindictively, every time he could, regardless as to whether they were German, French or British.

In fact, the diary says: "French and British fire at us more vigorously than the Germans, probably because the latter are afraid of giving their positions away. Anyway, there should be larger distinguishing circle-marks on the Allied planes, for the troops cannot recognise the difference between Aviatic and Farmans, Taubes and Blériots."

Meanwhile officers and men took it in turn to sleep under their machines in ceaseless rain at Fère-en-Tardenois, in the constant expectation of being ordered Forward. Daily, those who went 'up' visited those who had been 'brought down' in the little clearing station in the Church at Braisnes; and, as those who were brought down left space for others to go up, daily Robert went up, now, on reconnaissance.

On the last of the Fère reconnaissances, he spied a wisp of blue smoke which indicated a German kitchen and led to the discovery of a faint trench line nearby. This discovery made him very happy. He was making good, he felt, as an observer.

. . . . . .

As the Allies could not dislodge the enemy from the Aisne, the attempt at an outflanking movement North began. The aerodrome was uprooted again.

Monday, October 5.

"Left with Christie and heavy transport at 4 o'clock. Got tied up with Household Brigade on a bad road. Our heavy lorries were stuck in the mud wholesale. We had to leave one—Maples—behind, abandoned. Worked all night (15 hours) getting another out. This was East of Villa Cotterets. Resumed march at 10 a.m. on the 6th."

Tuesday, October 6.

"Continued march till nightfall. Then, billetted at La Ferme du Bel Air, N.E. of Clermont. Comfortable billet, but unwholesome man in kitchen.

Wednesday, October 7.

"Resumed march 4 a.m. Arrived Amiens 11 o'clock. Had

bath. Did shopping. Dined at Hotel du Rhin. Was ever War conducted in such comfort."

(Note: If they marched hard, there was a bath and food at the end of it, which he had never had in the Boer War!)

On Thursday, October 8, he went up on his seventh reconnaissance with Pilot Pretyman, $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours. "St. Omer and back to Abbeville. Reported area clear of enemy."

(One result of this reconnaissance was that supplies were straightway moved to St. Omer as the new and probable base of the R.F.C.)

Next day he was up again reconnoitring East and North between Abbeville and Poperinghe. The report reads: "Saw masses of enemy." Alas! the Germans were moving North as fast as the Allies, extending their line towards the coast and leaving no flank to turn.

This reconnaissance lasted 3 hours and 35 minutes. It would have lasted longer, so determined were he and the pilot to bring back detailed and accurate news, but as it was they landed at St. Pol after dark, and the diary says: "Reported reconnaissance to Salmond by telephone."

On these reports hung the fate of ground troops, and almost the success or failure of the outflanking movement. Robert was in one of the ten serviceable flying machines, so he and the pilot were one-tenth of the Eyes of the Army. Grave was their responsibility. There might have been an unhappy ending to this night landing on strange ground without flares had the pilot, Sergeant Carr[1], not been one of Hendon's crack exhibition pilots and incidentally Grahame-White's former Chief Mechanic. Hectic times were bringing the old 'uns together again. Back they flew to their aerodrome at dawn next morning.

Tuesday, October 13.

"Ninth reconnaissance. Pilot Birch[2]. 3 hours 15 minutes.

"Between Aire and Armentières was clear. Heavy mists and low clouds later made it impossible to find Lille.

[1]Sergeant Carr was Major Carr in 1918 in command of an experimental station R.A.F.

[2]In in 1918 Pilot Birch was a Lieut.-Col., commanding a Wing, R.A.F. On one occasion he had a forced landing in Holland, and escaped from the country and internment by disguising himself as a fireman.

"Flew East and descended to 500 feet in order to land and inquire whereabouts, when we ran slap into three regiments of German infantry, who opened fire on us. Rose from this hornet's nest and flew by compass South-West. By luck sighted St. Omer and came down. Only one bullet hole in wing!"

Wednesday, October 14.

"Worked transforming St. Omer into an aerodrome."

Friday, October 16.

"Joined detachment A. Flight at Hinges, taking heavy transport with me. (At about this time, his C.O. became Major John Salmond[1], who took over from his brother Geoffrey.)

The outflanking movement had failed. In the race northwards the Germans reached the coast at the same time as the Allies.

Aeroplanes were now co-operating with the Artillery to direct gunfire on positions that the Germans had fortified, or on German heavy batteries, as the Allies were making a great attempt to keep the battle moving and force the Germans back. The Germans were making an even greater attempt to hold their ground and bring the action to a standstill. As the Germans won over this, a grimly-contested but rarely-changing line of trenches faced each other down the length of France for the next four years.

Yet, at the beginning—end of October, start of November, 1914—if only our men had worried the Germans a little more consistently or had pushed on during the night instead of leaving the Boche several hours of undisturbed darkness in which to dig himself in, the tale might have been told differently. At least, that was the view of 2nd Lieutenant R. Loraine, observer-on-probation No. 3 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps. And he knew it was not the Tommies' lack of willingness to push on that was to blame, it was simply that the troops were not ordered on. Time and again such notes as these appear in the diary: "Found new German battery South-East of La Bassée, and three lines of trenches. Nothing there yesterday." And an advance which should tactically have taken place three days previously would then be ordered against that position,

[1]Later, Marshal of the Air, Sir John Salmond, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O.

only to meet with a rebuff or, if the position had to be taken, heavy loss of life. That is how the picture struck 2nd Lieut. Loraine. But he saw only a minute portion of it. He knew nothing of the considerations that must have weighed with the planning of tactics at G.H.Q.—and the German forces outnumbered the Allies during this time.

On Sunday, October 18 he did his 'best reconnaissance'—according to the diary. "Generals Headlam, Charles Ferguson and Smith-Dorrien all very pleased."

In the afternoon he was put on to Artillery Observation—or the task of directing Artillery Fire on to a particular target. This 'ranging' was rather different to carrying out a reconnaissance. The pilot circled round the target while the observer signalled by means of Very lights back to the Battery, informing them as to their marksmanship and results.

A very simple system of Very lights was used: White light—ready. Red light—more to the right. Green light—more to the left. Red-Green light—*correct line.* (After Red-Green had appeared) Red—over mark. Green—short of mark. Red-Green—correct line and range.

To send these signals and judge the aim and effect of the British fire, the plane had to circle very low over the target and literally sit on top of the German anti-aircraft guns. All German key-points were strongly protected with anti-aircraft guns, spouting Archies. So that Artillery ranging meant a hair-raising time for pilot and observer. The diary comment on this first 'shoot,' which lasted for 1 hour, 30 minutes, was: "*Only partially successful owing to Gunner-Major not understanding Very light Signals.*"

But the sequel was entered in the Diary in the following Thursday: "*Salmond told me of unofficial complaint regarding Very Light Signals. Gunner-Major evidently trying to excuse his own indifferent work.*"

There were far greater ructions over this unofficial complaint than transpire in that bare note. 2nd Lieut. Loraine was only an observer on probation. If he did not make good, he would be transferred out of the Flying Corps. He very nearly was. . . .

According to Brancker's Memoirs: "Loraine was short-sighted. I very promptly got a letter complaining that I was sending out observers who could not see. However, Loraine's courage saw him through, and he made so good that as a reward he was afterwards sent home to be trained as a fighting pilot. He became one of our most courageous and enterprising pilots and rose to command a Wing before the end of the War."

All the same, on that date—Friday, October 23, 1914—back he was sent to ordinary reconnaissance, 3 hours 10 minutes, over the line Armentières, Courtrai, Lille, La Bassée. And he was kept to that line daily—pending decision.

On Wednesday, October 28th, at dawn, he: "Found Comines Bridge down. Menin packed with enemy infantry. At Turcoing and Lille about 5000 Cavalry. Also much rolling stock and transport at Courtrai and Lille.

"Took charge of Hotchkiss machine-gun."

(Note: This was one of the first aeroplanes to be fitted with a machine-gun, and although it was awkward and rudimentary in its fitting, and could only fire to the side, it marked the transition of former flying toys into fighting machines.)

On the following Friday, the reconnaissance showed: "Battle proceeding at Deulemont and enemy reserves massing!"

Saturday, October 31, cold weather had set in, and on the dawn reconnaissance: "Rudder action impeded, landed Bailleul. Re-started. Carburettor froze. Returned St. Omer."

On Sunday, November 1.

"Dawn reconnaissance: Motor started missing at Courtrai. Owing to loss of height, could not attack enemy's observation balloon. Saw curious massing of Cavalry at Gheluwe.

"*Order came at lunch for every machine to go with bombs to Gheluwe, as Kaiser was there.*

"Left at 2 p.m. with Pilot Birch on a Blériot. The machine could not climb well with weight of bombs. Dropped bombs[1] on Gheluwe at a height of 3,700 feet, 3 Reds, 10 hand grenades. Reported German inaction on ground.

[1]These bombs were dropped without bomb-sights, as none were fitted then. In all probability the little champagne bottles did no harm. In fact, it was learned later that the Kaiser had already left Gheluwe by the time the bombing expedition arrived.

"Flew 5 hours, 45 minutes all day. Total: 54 hours observation flying in all."

So the days went on with Robert as an observer under observation; and as yet there was no decision. Every day brought its own train of incidents. On *Monday, November 2* he went out on his 21st Reconnaissance in a Henri Farman. The peculiarity of this machine was that the observer was slung directly underneath the pilot: his head was separated by a board from the pilot's feet. Both seats were in the open, there could be no pretence at any kind of cockpit. Moutray-Read—of the carrot expedition—and he started off at 7.8 a.m. At 8.10 a.m. near *Menin*, Moutray-Read was shot. Robert received some of the blood that was falling from him into the air, and this told him that Moutray-Read had been wounded. He immediately *climbed up and over* to help Read, should he relax his hold on the levers. But Read was strong enough to land the machine near Ypres. Robert took him to hospital at Ypres, and resumed the reconnaissance, "flying myself." How his pulses must have throbbed at having to fly himself, however sorry he felt for the pilot; and how mortified he must have been when the engine failed and he had a forced landing at Dickebusch. "For one awful moment," proceeds the diary, "I thought I had made a mistake and come down in the enemy's lines owing to the singular blue of the French uniform. I was preparing to set the machine alight when they yelled out: Francais.

"Only two hours' flying."

Followed blank days of fog and no flying. Instead there was machine-gun practice. The next time he went out it was in fog and thick low clouds. It was essential that the planes should go out and bring in information for enemy reserves might be massing. Off went pilot and observer down the old line Armentières, Courtrai, Lille, La Bassée, and very difficult it was to see. The pilot frankly did not care to be flying so low and was all for coming home. Says the diary: "*Had difference of opinion regarding route with pilot.*"[1]

[1]This was tantamount to insubordination, for reconnaissances were under the direction of the pilot—contrary to the German plan which placed them under the direction of the observers.

"Returned and resumed immediately with Birch piloting the same machine. Did three hours' further reconnaissance. Reported signs of infantry retirement at Menin, trains leaving Courtrai eastward.

"Transport at Turcoing Station and activity. Two enemy planes made half-hearted attempts to attack us over Lille.

"5 hours 45 minutes flying in a day."

And the answer to that reconnaissance was that he was sent off once again to make good on Artillery Observation! He had won the day.

. . . . . .

A marvellous cool pilot—Sergeant Dunn—took him on artillery observation. This man would circle round and round the target, regardless of any interference, sneezing at Archies. But Robert was taking no chances. He spent a day first with the 109th Battery of 4.7-inch guns at Estaires. Met the Major, met the Colonel, "so that we shall have a clear understanding as to what we are doing." Fog prevailed for three days after this understanding, but on Sunday, November 8th, there is a diary entry: "Still foggy, but did 3 hours 30 minutes artillery observation with Dunn till we got the guns on to target 3. Good work."

Now came rumours of a big 'push,' a super-offensive, and Dunn and Robert were anxious to do well and be in the forefront of it; not from any slaughter angle, but from excitement and the desire to win. Luck was against them for the next week, as clouds closed down to within 300 ft.; this was followed by a storm which stopped all actual flying except the kind of flying in which aeroplanes did their best to get off the ground, unpiloted, in spite of being pegged down with seventeen ropes apiece. After this, they went on patrol duty to protect Lord Roberts, who was at Lacon.

By now everybody felt certain there would be a 'push,' as Roberts had come out. In reality, the wonderful old man had only come to cheer the Indian troops, and when he died on this visit to them they took it as such a bad omen that the majority had to be recalled from the Western Front.

Before this, however, Robert had "directed the Lahore

A Henri Farman Reconnaisance Machine, 1914, showing the pilot (not Robert) on top, and the observer with his machine gun slung underneath. This was the type of machine in which Loraine climbed from the under carriage to the top, in mid-air, when Montray-Reid was shot on November 2nd.

Division Royal Artillery 109th Battery on to Target 7 after flying for *4 hours and 45 minutes.* During this time, two shrapnel bullets from Archie passed between Dunn's feet. He remained circling, and I dropped a note on the German gunner telling him he couldn't hit the sky."

In the same light-hearted vein, after his flight, he called on Maude (Cyril Maude's son) at the Headquarters of the 8th Ghurkas; "and was detained there as a spy, *because his own regiment did not know of Maude's existence*!" (Maude had been serving away from his regiment for several years and had rejoined them during the confusion of an advance!) A mechanic had to be sent from No. 3 Squadron to identify 2nd Lieut. Loraine and at the same moment as the mechanic arrived, Maude turned up from shopping in Béthune!

(This is the only reference to the social side of his life in France in the diary.)

Sunday, November 15.

"Storm. No flying. Saw General Scot and Major Poole, *114th Heavy Battery.*"

Monday, November 16.

"Battery reconnaissance for 114th, with Dunn, 1 hour 45 minutes. Started Artillery Fire Control when our inlet valve broke over the enemy's lines. Planed down to our own lines at Béthune."

He was to have no luck with the 114th, for on the next day Dunn and he had no sooner started Artillery Fire Control than they were forced to land at Bailleul owing to a heavy snowstorm. They flew back to Hinges and landed through this snowstorm—a feat in itself, but as Robert notes: "Nothing done."

Conditions at camp during this time were indescribable —wind howling, snow falling or rain pouring, sodden hangars collapsing and flopping dismally, often fatally, over planes, machines wrecked and aerodromes under water—yet, on Saturday, November 21, he and Dunn worked for eight hours with mechanics until they succeeded in getting a Blériot off the ground to go up on point duty over Loos, guarding the Prince of Wales.

It was not until Sunday 22nd that he started Artillery Fire Control again. This time his pilot was Cobett-Wilson, the man who had flown the Irish Channel two years after he did —from Wrexford in Wales to Wexford in Ireland—a man who had no more sense of fear than Robert. There was a very strong east *head-wind* that day, which brought them practically to a standstill over the German anti-aircraft guns, when they were above their target.

What cared Corbett-Wilson, what cared Robert, except that the "114th Battery *never fired at all*!" the diary exclaims. Furious, he dropped a note on the German anti-aircraft gunner saying: "Keep your eye in, we will be back this afternoon," and went to see what was happening to the 114th.

True to their word, back came he and Cobett-Wilson that afternoon, to direct Artillery Fire for three-quarters of an hour with the engine revving her full into an East wind, while the plane stayed almost at a standstill over the target at Fromelles.[1] "*I was shot at 3.10 p.m.*," notes the diary. "*Brought to Field Hospital at LILLERS.*" (Note: Italic data were inserted in diary later.)

Monday, November 23.

"At Lahore Clearing Station Hospital, La Mairie, Lillers."

(He had been wounded by a bullet from an anti-aircraft shell which had hit him in the back and crossed his right lung from bottom to top, coming out just under the collar-bone in front.)

As the head of Lillers' Hospital wrote to the *Times*: "A close shave. He was very bad when he was brought into us, and for a week it was touch and go because of a considerable loss of blood. But I think he will be all right now." Robert wrote later: "Had I been standing or walking I would have gone out right away, as the excessive bleeding would have suffocated me. Being seated, I found that by leaning forward and not attempting to breathe with the injured lung, but

[1]A few weeks later Corbett-Wilson was again taking Artillery Fire Control over Fromelles, when he was shot down in flames.

McCudden, V.C., one of the greatest airmen of the War, says he had the profoundest respect for the Anti-aircraft Battery at Fromelles. Evidently there was no great need to tell the gunners to keep their eye in.

being content with small gasps with the uninjured one, I could conquer suffocation for a time.

"As my reconnaissance was of immediate importance, I tried to continue, but found that details were utterly beyond me. So I asked the pilot go to back to our landing-ground, telling him I was hit. Then, as there was nothing else to do, I fainted."

They treated him marvellously at Lillers Hospital, and he remembered it.

Remembered also how, after he had had his shot of morphia the first night, Maurice Baring and F. E. Smith came round and stood beside him and wondered out loud whether he would last till morning. The doctor replied, 'I will leave him here all night.' Space was important; it was a clearing station. Beds could not be taken up except by the living. Robert struggled with the thought: Shall I tell them I'm alive and not to put me out—or shall I take advantage of the morphia—go to sleep—get back my strength and show them in the morning?

(The morphia or his lung settled it for him, for on trying to think he lost consciousness.)

The notes in the diary were all inserted later from a 'social' pad kept by his nurse. He, of course, had no recollection of anything.

Tuesday, November 24.

"*Received Last Sacrament.* (Note: This must have been the practice in that Hospital). Samson (Commander R. N. A. S.) and Arthur Lee called.

Wednesday, November 25.

Christie and Admiral Tufnell called.

Thursday, November, 26.

Received Last Sacrament.

Friday, November 27.

Surgeon-General O'Donnell called.

A letter also came from Major Salmond, pencilled on a thin torn scrap of Field Service note-book: "My dear Loraine, I was awfully sorry to hear about you, but am *V* glad indeed to hear you are getting on well. I came to see you your first

night, but they would not let me in. I shall come along as soon as I can get away and have a yarn. Very busy here. Changed the aerodrome[1], and the new one is giving a lot of trouble. We all miss you very much in the mess and just as much in the field. Cheerio, old boy, and buck up and get well. Yrs.—JACK SALMOND.

"P.S.—Smart has been informed."

Robert had been due to dine with Smart the day he was shot. Smart was in the trenches at Hazebroucke. He had gone out to Flanders as a Captain, but he was to hold the Hazebroucke portion of the front line as C.O. of his battalion for three weeks, while his battalion was gradually reduced to the strength of a company. Only a professional soldier could have done that. Smart had seen service in the Sudan at Omdurman as a lad of eighteen. "There's nothing to complain about," he told the men at Hazebroucke. "The food's prime. The life is as healthy as winter sports in Switzerland. . . ." He didn't mention the bullets; they mentioned themselves.

As for Robert, he continued to pull slowly round. The head of the hospital was determined to save him.

Smart could not come to see him, but other visitors continued to call.

Saturday, November 28.

Major Salmond called.

Monday, November 30.

F. E. Smith called (later Lord Birkenhead).

By December 2nd, sentences he had given War correspondents were appearing blown into interviews. There was one on "the dwindling number and combativeness of the German Taubes, which were being driven out of the sky." Now it is certain he could only have managed to say: 'No Taubes. Driven out.' But it was probably clear to War correspondents that, however ill he might be, he was still fighting and living mentally in the R.F.C. Newspapers gave him greater publicity than they would have given many a general. It was nothing to the press that he was only a 2nd Lieutenant,

[1]The new aerodrome was a *beet field* at Choques, which took a considerable time to roll and harden up before machines could get off the ground.

observer on probation, in the R.F.C. To the public he was still a pioneer airman, actor-soldier, good copy. And he always said something worth while.

Monday, December 8.

Left Lillers and arrived Boulogne.

Friday, December 11.

Arrived 26 Park Lane. (Hospital.)

. . . . . .

Bernard Shaw was the first to be officially informed of Robert's wound, as Robert had received permission from G. B. S. to quote him as his next-of-kin. (Cousin Florence of the Boer War lived away in Liverpool and had a son of her own at the Front.) Very soon he received the following letter from G. B. S., typical of the care that Shaw bestowed on him during the War.

Ayot St. Lawrence, Welwyn, Herts. 10 Adelphi Terrace, W.C.

13th December, 1914.

My dear Loraine,—Charlotte managed to track you down within twenty-four hours of your landing by a sustained frontal attack on the War Office and the Horse Guards. Before that we could hear nothing about you except legendary matter, mostly to the effect that instead of doing your duty by observing the enemy's positions and bringing back reports, your habit was to charge the Uhlans with your aeroplane, at last driving the French to declare that if you were not speedily slain there would not be a serviceable flying machine left in the whole . . . army.

The first credible news was that you were hit; the next, that you had lost a lung. This alarmed me, because one of my uncles lost a lung, and though he recovered all his previous robustness of habit, yet he died of it after lingering in this state for forty-seven years.

We called yesterday, but were informed by a sympathetic footman that you were not to see anybody. We wanted to see you for two special reasons:

(1) To know whether there is anything you want that we

can get you or send you, or anything that we can do that you want done.

Charlotte made inquiries during your active service as to what ought to be sent to officers in the field. At the shops they knew all about it, and proposed silver-mounted dressing-cases, dispatch-boxes, baths, roasting jacks, and arm-chairs. Then she asked men who had come back from the front. They all said: "Bromo paper. Nothing else. And disguise it as much as possible in the packing, or it will be stolen."

Such suggestions, although sensible, are the death of romance.

(2) I wanted to see for myself how you were; for I knew that medical reports and diagnoses were worth nothing in the face of your powers of acting, and that it was just a toss-up whether you would be in the mood to wile away your last hour by a breezy cheerful: "It's nothing; I shall be out again in a week," or, if you felt exceptionally full of beans, to treat them to a death-bed scene that would plunge the whole hospital into convulsive weeping. The Colonel of the Horseguards (Peterkin was his martial name; and he was very nice to Charlotte) reported you as on the cheery tack, from which I apprehended the worst.

I hope, anyhow, that you are bad enough not to be allowed out again; for really you have done enough for honour, and there are plenty of fellows who will stop shrapnel quite as effectively as you and who are not useful to their country in other respects as you are. This war seems likely at present to last about fifteen years, at the end of which the million heroes engaged will have a sudden common inspiration. They will say simultaneously: "This is a mug's game," and go home. Sic transit gloria mundi.

We are down at Ayot and shall be there until the middle or end of next week. I console myself for the bad weather by considering that it is important that you should be kept in the lowest spirits, as laughing cannot be good for shrapnel in the lung.

We have some Belgian wounded in this neighbourhood. They keep up their spirits by telling lies, for which there is

an unlimited demand. We all mourn the man who returned to the front last week. He was the man to whom a beautiful woman with her hands cut off by the Uhlans had said, holding up her bleeding stumps, "Remember me." I envy the desinvolture of one who, having seen the real thing, can still amuse himself in that fashion.

For my own part, I have been giving exhibitions of moral courage far surpassing anything achieved in the field; but so far I have not received the V.C.; in fact sarcastic suggestions that I should receive the iron one have not been lacking. However, you will find the papers rather less sanctimonious than they were before I gave their show away and substituted the trumpet for the harmonium as the martial instrument of Britain.

The situation of the British theatre is rather less eligible than that of Louvain at present; but the profession keeps alive by giving performances for the relief of the Belgians; also by reciting patriotic odes at the halls, the interest being kept up by announcements that the reciter is on 96 hours' leave from the trenches. By this means he often secures an engagement for a whole fortnight.

I must stop now, as I am told you should be written to gradually. I have tried to be as gradual as possible. Do not bother about acknowledging. The nurse can make a note of our telephone number—8131 City (it is not in the book). My secretary, Miss Elder, or Mrs. Bilton, the housekeeper, can take any message and send it on; or they can do anything you want.

We were down most of the time at Torquay, where I wrote my immortal Common Sense about the War, and set chairs at the Pavilion for the wounded Belgians. The band played Tipperary for these warriors, who, instead of rising on their crutches and bursting into enthusiastic cheers, made it only too clear by their dazed demeanour that they were listening to this tune for the first time in their lives.

Ever,

G. B. S.

Sunday, December 13.

End of third week wounded, notes the diary.

. . . . . .

By the end of the fourth week he was allowed visitors. But they were all warned to keep a wide smile and show no astonishment when they were taken in to see him. Broad cheerfulness was the watchword. He had quite a difficult time persuading some of them he had been wounded. On Christmas Day he was allowed a bath. As he was being wheeled to the bathroom he caught sight of another fellow in a bath-chair, in one of the mirrors down the passage. This fellow was in the bathroom, and Robert turned to speak to him. To his astonishment he found no one, yet when he turned again there was the white-bearded stranger in the mirror. All of a sudden, with a horrible sinking, he recognised his own nurse behind the fellow and realised it was himself. A gaunt, bloodless spectre! Horrible! Everything went black in front of him. "There, there," said the nurse. "You'll be all right, you've pulled through."

The odd thing was he had never seen himself even in a hand-mirror since he had been wounded. He had been too ill. He was so used to being considered and considering himself good-looking, that when he had gone flying in the old days he had purposely adopted a disagreeable mien the more thoroughly to change his personality. Now his personality had changed without him. He had a fear that perhaps he was only a 'had been,' that he would never be right again. Yes, that would account for the jokiness of his friends; they knew he was finished.

"Not a bit of it," said the doctor. "Lung wounds are tricky at first, but once on the mend, they heal. All that white hair in your beard and on your head will turn brown. A sea-trip will put you right. Don't shave; don't tire yourself. Go away. Forget everything. And you'll be back, fit to return to the Front before—well, quicker than you would ever believe."

Strange talk, that may seem, to a man whose weight was down to 6 stone 5 lbs. from 13 stone; who could barely lift

a cup to his lips; whose protruding bones and shrunken limbs made him a horror to himself, and caused the tears to roll unbidden down his cheeks. But he wanted to go back to France. He had a letter in his pyjama side-pocket from Salmond—on the usual torn scrap of Field Service note-book—which told him he was to be retained in the Flying Corps and probably become a fighting pilot. Not in those words; the hint came like this: "You have been recommended for a course of wireless, but, of course, you must get fit first, old man, before you start any pranks like that." So Salmond wanted to keep him. Further on, the letter said: "Evans went back to his regiment to-day and wished me to send you his love." Evans was another short-sighted fellow; he had been sent back. Yet he was a grand fighter, quite unafraid —Robert knew it—and some months later Curly Evans was to receive the V.C. for walking up to a pill-box[1] that was checking an advance.

By aiming with his revolver through the air-holes at the men operating the guns inside, Curly Evans was able to silence that pill-box—he himself being under fire the whole time. It was to be one of the most incredible, sensational V.C.'s. Yet this Curly Evans was sent back to his Regiment out of the Flying Corps. And Robert was now to remain and probably become a pilot. How he wanted to get back to the Squadron.

A sea-trip to Buenos Aires was planned for him at the end of January, a deck cabin booked on the R.M.S. *Alcantara.* Straightway came a letter from Shaw: "Charlotte talks of your sea voyage as quite close at hand—a week or so hence. Have you any money? If not, can I be of any use?

Yours ever,

"G. Bernard Shaw."

"P.S.—I always make it a rule to inquire into a man's private affairs with extreme delicacy; but I think my meaning is clear."

Dear, generous Shaw.

It so happened that Robert did not need any money, but he was a little frightened of the long voyage, of being lonely

[1]A pill-box was an armoured turret containing machine-guns.

and bored. He meant to revise Morse in readiness for the course in wireless; but he dreaded the long time to be spent cooped up in his bunk in the cabin. Nor could he call on Smart to accompany him, for Smart was in the trenches. He could have asked his ward to come; she was living in Hampstead. But his ward was not what he wanted. His mind was still living in the Flying Corps and through the weeks he had spent in France: weeks of momentous happenings, of future war-shaping experiences which must not pass unrecorded. He replied by asking Shaw for advice as to how to write a book.

Shaw's answer is given in full: for, although Shaw was never in the Flying Corps, his instructions present a clearer picture of the flying-soldier at work, than any to be found in the bare notes of Robert's diary. They give a clearer picture, too, than any reminiscences in war books from flying men.

"It is very hard without regular professional experience of writing on a particular subject," says the letter, "to know how much space one's material will take. Matter that seems to fill one's mind to the very limit of the universe boils down unexpectedly into three pages; and, on the other hand, details that are not foreseen at all in conceiving the book spread out to whole volumes. You will not know until it comes to actual pen and ink how much or how little of what you know or what you think can be turned to literary account.

"You will find that before you can write a book about military aeroplaning, you will have to think about it. But you must be particularly careful not to write about it. This apparently idiotic remark is really a very sensible and important one. It all turns on the innocent word 'about.' You must get the actual thing down on paper and avoid writing *about* it, or chronicling the process of thinking *about* it which you had to agonise through before you started. The public won't want to know how you got at your conclusions: it wants, first of all, to know what military aeroplaning is actually like; and not until it knows that will it be interested in or capable of following any argument or generalising *about* it.

"Therefore if I had the job to do, I should start straight

away with my diary. I should describe exactly what happens to a flier in the field from the moment he wakes up in the morning to the climax at which he is riddled with bullets four thousand feet up. I should describe roughly what has to be done to the machine before it is dragged out, and where it has passed the night, and how you get into it, and how much room there is for you in it, and whether you always have the same machine and the same pilot, or whether you have to take your chance as with a taxi, and what clothes you have to wear, and all about the coloured pencils stuck in your gloves for map-marking, and the compass, and the aneroid, and the barograph and the stop-watch, and the sphygmograph —to record the jumps given by your heart when a shell bursts near you—and the stethoscope, and the bottle of hair dye—to conceal the ravages of terror—and the fountain-pen and the field-glasses and the goggles, and everything else that you carry as part of your equipment, or that the other fellow carries. I should describe the business of spotting artillery positions and of reconnaissances. I should describe the descent, and the report, and the use made of the report; for instance in the case of artillery positions, the sort of memorandum the officer to whom you report gives to the artillery officer, so as to set him firing in the air at something that not one of them except the flier has ever seen or will ever see."

(Note: Such positions were made clear later by aerial photography.)

"All this will be very interesting, and exactly what the public wants to know. It will also be technical in the way that the reader likes things to be technical: that is, intelligibly technical. Technical terms madden people when they don't understand them; but when the meaning is clear they like them, because they can repeat them in private conversation with an air of knowing all about it.

"Next, I would go on from the things that happen every day as a matter of course to the things that may happen at any moment, such as wounds, failure of engine, fogs, attacks by hostile aeroplanes, or catching sight of them and having to attack them, and generally, what may be called adventures,

including a statement not only of the things you have to do out of your own head in emergencies, but the things as to which you have permanent orders, such as attacking hostile aircraft at sight, or destroying your machine to prevent it from falling into the enemy's hands. Also the routine of surrender, and, of course, the relations between the observer and the pilot, as far as this can be delicately done.

"You can set to all this without thinking about it. All you have to do is simply to recollect and trust to your native faculty for dramatic narrative without (for God's sake) any conscious exploitation of it. But by the time you have finished you will discover that you have been quite naturally led to think a lot about it all; and you will find yourself ready to go on to any theorising and generalising that may seem safe to you. You will not only have strategy and tactics, and the relative merits of flotated dirigibles and heavier-than-air-craft, with accounts of such duels between aeroplanes and zeppelins as you may have been engaged in or know about, but also a very interesting chapter about bomb-dropping on towns. Everybody wants to know whether we shall have in future to live under bomb-proof shelters by electric light and never see the sun, or else to give up war. Incidentally, you can go into the technique of bomb-dropping.

"That is how the matter arranges itself in my mind; and it is quite good enough to start on; for in the end the thing will arrange itself.

"Don't write in any particular attitude, dignified or popular or otherwise. That will only lead to acting—in the sense that you beg an actor at rehearsal not to act. Let it just come as it will, naturally. Correcting its manners is a matter for revision on the proof; it is a matter for altering a word here and there to spare somebody's feelings, and does not affect one word in every thousand. All good style comes from being sincere and saying what you mean as exactly as possible.

"This is all I can think of at present. I doubt if you will be able to write much on board ship. However, you can try in the intervals of struggling with the Morse Code. And so, bon voyage.—Yours ever,

"G. BERNARD SHAW."

It might be held that Shaw had, in this letter, already written the book for Robert. Certainly no novice can ever have been set so clearly on the road.

Armed with this, his war diary, and cornucopeias of fruit from his friends—fruit was difficult to get in those days—as well as a huge map of the Western Front pinned over the desk in his cabin, Robert set sail on the *Alcantara*. But, as Shaw had foreseen, the sea wiped everything from his mind, even his life with the R.F.C. He came on deck at Madeira, and after that spent the halcyon days crossing the South Atlantic on the bridge with the Captain, studying navigation!

At Rio and Buenos Aires he was photographed and appeared in all the papers, giving prolific interviews on the highly-debatable subjects of German atrocities, and the Allies' chances of winning the War. Replying to this, he pointed eloquently to the interned German merchant shipping in South American ports, but left the Germanically-sympathetic population of Brazil and the Argentine doubting the possibility of Allied victory.

He still had a beard and still looked socket-eyed, but five weeks later, when he returned to London, he had recaptured 6 stone, and all that remained of his beard was a perky moustache. He was once again the irrepressible, daredevil, buoyant and much-friended Bob-about-town. And the tales he told. Something was always happening to him. The ship had been chased all the way home—or he thought she had been chased—by one of the roaming German cruisers that had not yet been rounded up.

As they were approaching Pernambuco, the cruiser actually hove in sight, and it didn't take the Captain two minutes to alter his course. But the stranger was fleeter than they and bore down upon them apace. The relief experienced by life-belted passengers marshalled in rows on the deck was immense when she proved to be British. Signals were exchanged, in response to which the *Alcantara* materially altered her course.

Nearer home, Robert—who was dividing his time between the bridge and the wireless operator's cabin—intercepted a commercial cable: 'Am in possession of three thousand 434

Western Union shares and 730 Soap Bolivar.' This was during one of the slack night watches when he took the operator's place. He scrawled it down as he scrawled down everything he deciphered, and was about to destroy it later when something in the figures struck him as familiar. On referring to the chart, he discovered that at noon next day the ship would be crossing a point 730 miles south of England and 434 west of Oporto. He went straight to the captain with the cable and the query: Might this be the prowling German cruiser? The ship's course was altered once more and a message sent out. Next day, at sundown, a British cruiser appeared alongside. She informed them that a German submarine had been sunk a few hours back in waters 730 miles South of England, 434 west of Oporto! All due to Robert intercepting the cable. And the British cruiser escorted them back to Southampton.

He told the tale better than that; he was a vivid raconteur. It is given here without proof or corroboration, for all that remains now is the crumpled sheet of Royal Mail Packet note-paper on which he scrawled the cable, which has survived solely because he placed it among his few war souvenirs.

These tales were readily swallowed by his friends, because they were not half so astonishing as his obvious recovery and pink-of-condition appearance. There was something rather fabulous about him; he inevitably gathered an aura of legendary matter. And he was preposterous. He had brought home a cargo of parrots as presents for all his women friends. Not one of them escaped receiving a macaw, a sulphur and cream cockatoo, or a pair of long-tailed screeching parakeets. These birds were highly unsuitable, inconvenient war-time gifts—how were they to be fed?—but they showed that Bob had remembered them.

Even his departure back to the front was lit with sensation. For great-hearted Fred Terry dashed up from the Strand Theatre, where he was playing Charles II, in his wig and costume, to shake hands with Bob and wish him God speed on the night he went back. An April night, full of pleasant memories and stirring prospects.

CHAPTER XII

He was at Le Crotoy only a week before he was sent back to England to be trained at Shoreham and Hounslow in bomb-dropping, aerial acrobatics, aerial photography and wireless. Here he also learned to give the same care to his aeroplane as an Arab gives to his steed. For the first time he became intimately acquainted with the constructional side of an aeroplane; so that when he went back to France in July, his pilot's log-book is filled with notes on the testing of engines—both between and on reconnaissances—and suggestions for magnifying speed.

This was very necessary, as the advent of the then high-powered German Fokker was interfering with Allied reconnaissances and for all practical purposes chasing Allied machines out of the air. These Fokkers never came over the Allied lines, as it was considered essential that none of them should fall into the enemy's hands. They lay in wait, high up over the German lines ready to swoop down on the slow and heavy Allied reconnaissance machines.

Allied planes were clearly marked now, with very large red, blue and white circles on the wings, while the Germans had black crosses. In the clear Summer weather reconnaissance and *wireless* Artillery control (no longer the old Very light system) was carried out at 9,000 and 10,000 ft. In a B.E.2.C., the widest used reconnaissance machine of that period, Robert notes on August 26th, 1915, that it took him 1 hour to climb 6,300 ft., 1½ to reach 8,200 ft. and 2 hours to reach 10,000 ft.! Heaven knows at what speed machines zoom up now. Incidentally German anti-aircraft gunnery had improved, and shrapnel hit his right upper and lower planes at 9000 ft. within 3 ft. of his head!

He was a hog for Wireless Artillery control, and once, after having been over a target for 2¼ hours, the note in his official log-book reads: "Ground station working disgracefully. Got to K.R.D. after two hours' work. Then petrol pipe junction

leaked, and although we wound it round with a pipe-cleaner secured by a hair-pin from Ellison's pockets—Ellison was his observer—the repair was only sufficient to bring us back to the aerodrome. Very disappointed."

Then he discovered the vibration of his engine caused faulty wireless transmission. Four different engines were fitted and tried in the machine to eliminate this defect. Finally one was also found to enable the B.E.2.C. to climb 8,700 ft. in an hour (recorded with triumph) and, after remaining aloft 3 hours and 50 minutes, "we ranged two batteries on one target and one on another. Wireless transmission working perfectly. Vibration no longer interfering."

He was promoted to a Flight-Commander (or Captain) on September 13th, 1915, and posted to B Flight No. 5 Squadron. *B Flight was the only R.F.C. fighting unit at that time in France.*[1] It was used for patrols.

Now he was given one of the new Vickers Fighter aeroplanes which had been brought out to *combat* the Fokker. And throughout the daily record of patrols, reconnaissances and photo-takings, occur the words—*After Hun.* But the Vickers could not get within striking distance of the Fokkers. Came the experiment of fitting the Vickers with a Le Rhône 110 h.p. motor, and Robert's report: "Propeller is of too small a pitch to utilise power of engine. Suggest trial of larger pitch propeller." Two weeks later a larger pitch propeller was fitted, with the result: "Machine flies beautifully. Noticeably faster. Raced with B.E.2.C.'s. Vicker's Fighter was 4 miles per hour faster."

Negligible as this speed increase might seem, it enabled him next day to engage and shoot down a German Albatross[2] —a German reconnaissance machine.

[1]It is a fact that at that time there was only one Flight in the R.F.C. entirely composed of fast fighting machines in France. A. Flight No. 5 Squadron was a Flight of Reconnaissance machines. C. Flight was for Artillery observation.

[2]Albatrosses *of that period* are not to be confused with Fokkers, for they were comparatively old-fashioned and often poorly equipped. (A little later, when Fokkers were on the wane, a superior Albatross appeared.)

Fokkers were fitted with machine-guns that could fire through their propellers; this gave them an immense fighting superiority. Allied planes at that time were only fitted with guns that fired at *an angle to their line of flight*, not straight ahead. It was not until the Constantinesco gear was invented and in general use on Allied

All that appears in the pilot's log-book is: "*October 26, 1915. On Vickers Fighter 5459, with Lieut. Lubbock—observer—2 hours and 20 minutes' patrol and photographs. Shot down Albatross.*"

But the official account is that he and Lieut. the Hon. Eric Lubbock were each awarded the M.C. Robert, for "conspicuous gallantry and skill when he attacked a German Albatross biplane, getting within fifteen yards of it. When the hostile machine dived he dived after it and followed it from a height of 9000 ft. to 600 ft. The enemy pilot was hit and his camera and wireless transmitter were subsequently found to have bullet holes through them. The Albatross fell in our lines."

Lieut. the Hon. Eric Lubbock "for firing deliberately and with effect during an almost vertical dive when the pilot was fully occupied." Actually Lieut. Lubbock had fired with deliberate effect before the vertical dive, during which time he was fully occupied in trying to unjam his machine-gun. Here is his own account from a letter to an old Etonian:

"Yesterday, Loraine and I had an exciting adventure. We sighted a German about four miles off and attacked. We both opened fire at about 50 yards. I fired again at about twenty-five, firing twenty-six rounds, and then my machine jammed. I heard Loraine give a great shout, but felt neither fear nor triumph. Then our machine turned downwards. As I fired my last shot, I had seen the German turn down. I knew that if he got below us my machine-gun was the only one that could fire at him, so I worked away trying to unjam it. We were diving, I standing almost on the front of the body. Then we turned level. I had finished my gun, all was ready, but —there was no German left to fire at. He had crashed in our lines. As both our guns—Loraine's and mine—had jammed at the same moment, I spent another five minutes unjamming Loraine's gun, and finally got both guns working.

machines towards the middle and end of 1917, that the Allies established their superiority in the air. The Constantinesco gear was a device that synchronised the fire of a machine-gun with the speed of the engine, so that the bullets passed between the blades of the propeller, enabling a machine-gun to fire straight ahead —and, in fact, all ways—regardless of the propeller.

"We saw another enemy coming in the distance, and Loraine went all out to climb and attack, while I put my stiff and aching hands in my mouth, praying for sufficient life to come back to them—they were frozen. Then our engine stopped and we were helpless, so we turned and glided homewards. Unable to reach the aerodrome, we landed in a plough, a beautiful landing.

"Later, I went round to see the machine we had crashed. The luckless Boche had fallen twenty yards behind our front line trench. The pilot was shot through the stomach; the observer, a boy of seventeen, only had his head grazed. In spite of his fall, he will be all right, but yesterday he was crying and absolutely nerve-broken. No wonder, poor thing. The pilot was dead before they could get him away.

"On the machine was found an old machine-gun. It had been taken from the Canadians months ago and now has come back to them, for the Albatross came to earth in Canadian lines. The gun is absolutely unfit for aeroplane work, being three times as heavy as the one we use, and having lots of other technical drawbacks. There was a camera with a Zeiss lens, which will be most valuable to us; although the camera was pierced by two bullets. There were some plates which are being developed at this moment. The camera is heavy and clumsy, and not a patch on ours. It is such that you cannot take a vertical photograph with it. There was a carbine, a very nice weapon, and a pistol for firing coloured lights, which had been hit by us and spoiled. There was also a priceless pair of binoculars magnifying eighteen times. I am to take all these things myself to General Headquarters, which makes me very shy.

"The German observer says he was given to understand that we tortured all our prisoners, and wondered when it was going to be over. He was also much surprised to hear that he was going to be taken to England, as the German Navy has control of all the seas, and England is completely cut off! *Now* one can understand why they go on fighting."

Robert's account was written much later. It occurs among notes he made comparing the different characteristics of

officers he served with, and starts with a description of Lubbock's struggles to carry out the C.O.'s command and become more '*offensive*,' continuing: "This was a lucky day and we had not far to search, as before I had got a thousand feet up, two machines could be seen coming from the enemy's country. A climb to 9000 feet brought me almost level with the first of them.

"I had asked Lubbock to hold his fire till I gave him the order, for I meant to engage at the closest possible quarters. As we drew near to the German, approaching each other nose to nose, I pretended to outclimb him. He opened fire at about 400 yards, and I stood my machine nearly on its tail to mislead him into thinking I was trying to gain the uppermost position, and so lure him on. As he came, I quickly dived, passing just below him with about five feet between my upper plane and his wheels, firing from both guns meanwhile, continuous fire with the enemy pilot as target.

"Directly I had passed under him, I turned and found him diving steeply. I dived after him, re-opening fire from both guns, which jammed. At one moment my dive became so vertical that Lubbock, who had released himself from the strap that bound him to the seat, so as to have freer movement to work his gun, was almost thrown out of the machine.

"I continued to dive, hoping to fire, when I saw the enemy crash behind our front lines. By this time I was about sixty feet[1] above the ground, and had to redress the machine from the dive into horizontal flight—an operation which is not without considerable danger, as the strain thrown on the wings under these conditions is very severe.

"We were flying Eastwards, and before I could turn we were over the enemy lines at about thirty feet under very heavy machine-gun fire. I turned quickly, however, and started climbing after the second enemy, who was still at about 9000 feet. When I was within about five hundred feet of him, the engine gave out owing to the strain of the vertical dive and the subsequent severe climb to which I had put her. We were able to glide back over our lines and make a forced

[1]Official communiqué says 600 feet.

landing in a ploughed field about a mile from the aerodrome.

"I was very elated at the result of the combat and somewhat shocked to find Lubbock in tears. "Just think of his mother," he said. "I hate this killing business."

'"Think of your mother," I said. "You can't win wars by weeping over the enemy's dead."

'"I don't think I mind risking my own life," he replied. "But I'm sure it's wrong to kill others. Wrong for me, I mean. I'm sure it is."

"Even when I got the engine working and we flew back to the aerodrome and alighted among cheers—our flight had been seen from Headquarters, and it was the first German aeroplane to be downed in our lines for some time—he was far from happy; and only slightly cheered that afternoon when I told him we were both to receive the M.C.

'"Ten days at home with your ribbon on your chest will do you good," I said. "You'll come back to the Squadron feeling so *offensive*, you'll have to be isolated."

"He came back feeling better, and I recommended him to be a pilot[1], and he became a good one. But although he fought well, he never had the joy of battle most men feel, nor their satisfaction over winning a fight. For patriotic reasons he had become a soldier (lying about his age and making himself out to be older than he was) only for his conscience to give him no peace for becoming a 'death-dealer."'

Not so Robert. His complex spirit was at rest, absorbed in fulfilling the single-track maxim of the C.O., an order which said: "You are daily to become more and more *offensive*." (It was the one way of heartening pilots against the Fokker menace.) If a man couldn't be happy in the Royal Flying Corps, the only branch of the Army which left scope for individual initiative, where would he be content? Half the day was spent in risking his life—excitingly—and the other half was spent in the company of congenial spirits. No camaraderie could exceed the pleasant sense of fellowship which bound members

[1]A week after becoming a pilot, the Hon. Eric Lubbock, M.C., was killed in an air fight.

of a Squadron. Fifteen years later, looking back on this period, Robert was to write of it "as a time which, in comparison to some of the shabby struggles of peace-days, seems to me almost idyllic in its singleness of purpose, its freedom from care, cark and unworthy strife."

His fight with the Albatross had been witnessed down the line from Ypres to Bailleul. Next day he dropped the following *communiqué* on an enemy aerodrome:

"O.C. FELDFLIEGE—ABSTIELUNG 33.

"The machine piloted by Unter-Offizier Gerold was shot down by an English Battle-plane on October 26th in the British lines. Unter-Offizier GEROLD, although mortally wounded, made a gallant but unsuccessful effort to fly back to his own lines.

"He died a few minutes after he was taken out of the machine, and is buried near Ration Farm LE ROSSIGNOL opposite MESSINES. His grave is marked with a cross with his name, rank and date.

"Lieut. BUCHOLZ was slightly wounded and is a prisoner of war. Herewith effects of Unter-Offizier GEROLD. Please acknowledge receipt of them as listed on the envelope."

These 'effects' were a finger-ring, rosary and his pocket-book with money in it. Also a map of the location of his grave.

When he dropped this message on the German aerodrome, Robert ran the gauntlet of their anti-aircraft fire, and also dropped a couple of bombs, so that the friendly gesture should not smack of any cessation of hostilities. In doing this he complied with the courtesy prevailing between the Flying Corps of either army: who exchanged information on fallen pilots, whenever possible, and also returned their private property.

Then Robert went home, dabbed on his ribbon and had ten days' rollicking leave. He did not know at the time that two Canadians had been killed pushing the Albatross back into dead ground away from the front line trenches, where the machine had provoked a hail of intense fire. He was not to know *that* until June, 1929, when a man[1] who had helped

[1]Mr. John Harris of the 16th Battalion Canadian Infantry who was in the trenches at Plugstreet (Ploegstreit).

push back the Albatross sent him the name-plate of the aeroplane and other souvenirs. Characteristically, Robert had never bothered to collect any souvenir of the plane at the time; it was sufficient for him that it had been brought down.

Life was good as a fighting pilot. Physically and mentally he had never felt better. He was nearly forty, but he did not realise this; and the age found him without any regrets, full of illusions as ingenuous and untarnished as a schoolboy's.

The following triumphant entry appears in his log-book the day after his return, recording a patrol at 11,000 feet. "Peto tube liquid froze. Compass froze. Gunner's face froze. Pressure diaphragm froze, causing forced landing without *breakage*." The clue to the triumph is the forced landing without breakage. He was becoming an airman, at last, in every sense of the word.

Shaw, alarmed at this complete submerging of the actor in the soldier, sent him his latest one-act plays to be acted by the Mess (producer: Robert), and chaffed him as follows:

"Serve you right being frozen! You have had your M.C. Why be greedy? There is nothing more in it now than to be able to say with the Ancient Mariner:

'——with my crossbow
I SHOT the Albatross.'

"And to think they gave you nothing for learning the Hell Scene in *Man and Superman*!"

As though any words or stage-parts could be expected to compare to the drama of the death and thunder of the Western Front. It was hell unloosed; but, as in all hells, there were spots of Heaven, and Robert had settled in one of these.

Every day he went up with a thumb-size copy of the 91st Psalm—He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty—a pocket edition of the Happy Warrior, and the bullets out of his lung as a mascot. These were carried in his breast-pocket when he went:

O.C. FELDFLIEGER-ABTEILUNG 3

The machine piloted by Unteroffizier Gerold was shot down by an ~~LIEUTENANT~~ BUCHHOLZ

English battle plane on Oct. 26. in the British lines Unteroffizier Gerold, ~~was killed~~ ~~by shot through the~~ ~~he~~ mortally wounded ~~was~~ but unconscious made a gallant effort to ~~get back~~ fly back to his own lines. ~~but fell~~

He died a few minutes after he was taken out of the machine and is buried ~~at~~ near Ration farm LE ROSSIGNOL opposite MESSINES. His grave is marked with a Cross with his name and rank and date of death.

LT. BUCHHOLZ was slightly wounded and is a prisoner of war.

Hereunder effects of the dead

Photostat of the draft of the letter dropped by Robert Loraine on October 27th, 1915, on the German aerodrome.

"*After eight Huns, who went down over their lines before I could get close enough to engage.*" (A favourite trick of the Huns then was to dive down over their lines and decoy machines into range of their anti-aircraft guns.) Or:

"*To deal with five Huns reported by 14th Corps to be interfering with their wire-cutting near Ypres. No Huns sighted. Came back and started after Hun reported to be bombing G.H.Q.*"

And every time he landed back at the aerodrome. His flights were crowded and eventful, but his life was charmed. The only trouble was, that if he caught cold, it would threaten to settle on his spare lung, the one that was not disabled; so that at the end of every seven weeks, five days for health was tacked on to the seven days Back to Blighty. Luck for him!

That was the picture of life as he saw it when commanding B Flight in No. 5 Squadron. But an amusing sidelight is thrown by Major F. J. Powell, M.C., then a lad of nineteen and the senior lieutenant in his Flight. Powell, among others, revolted against Loraine, after he had been in command three weeks.

"We were most awfully sick," he explains, "at the way we were being ordered about by this old man of thirty-nine. His record as a pilot before he came to us did not impress us, and in private life he was an actor! This made every one eye him with suspicion.

"In those days the Flying Corps was a highly individual service. Each officer had his own machine, housed in its own tent, with his own rigger and his own mechanic to attend to it. He regarded himself as a separate fighting unit. As a unit he was willing to co-operate, but he certainly could not be bossed about as though he were an air taxi-driver. (Loraine was a typical Air-Garage proprietor who treated his Flight as though men and machines were his.)

"The lads foregathered in the Mess and decided to apply in a body to the C.O. for a transfer, unless Loraine could be removed. I was all for this, but I thought it would be fairer to inform Loraine of our intention first, not foreseeing when I suggested it that the duty would devolve on me. I felt exactly like a schoolboy giving notice to the Headmaster when

I tackled Loraine next morning; it was all so different to the way I'd pictured it the night before in the Mess, sitting astride the piano with the others instructing me. (I don't believe I'd have felt as bad approaching the C.O., although like all Majors commanding a Squadron at that time, the C.O. lived in sublime detachment in a Mess of his own.) On hearing that I wished to speak to him, Loraine came out of his hut and took my arm with tremendous affability—this I felt strongly to be acting—and we marched up and down the aerodrome. At first the lads kept out of sight, decently. Then they watched openly, wondering what could be taking so long. I kept covering my confusion by saying to him: 'You understand, I'm speaking for all of us, sir.'

'"Yes, I understand that," he interjected. "But tell me in what way have I offended *you*, Poello?"

'"Well, sir," I said finally. "I entered my hangar yesterday morning and was astounded to find a number of mechanics from Headquarters fitting bomb-racks on my machine. When I asked them by whose authority they were meddling with my aeroplane, they said it was your orders, sir. Now that machine and I are indivisible, sir. Her engine is my very heart. It's unthinkable that an order for anything to be done to her should go through *any one* but me."

"Loraine considered this. "All right, Poello," he said. "Tell the boys that any orders affecting their machines in future will go through them. But woe betide any officer who is slack. It isn't Headquarters' Mechanics who will be responsible to me next time, but *you*, each one of you." And so the matter was settled. I'm bound to say he had it all his own way. But there was something unbeatable about the man when you got through his outer peremptoriness. He was so *real*, and not in the least bombastic. I could even see his point of view and all that he conceived to be his duty. If only, when giving an order, he had not been so autocratic. You felt that the officer was a conception of what he thought the part should be; Loraine, the man, was full of understanding. But outwardly he remained a disciplinarian to the last inch of him.

"He had the guts of a lion, however, and was also responsible

for devising a number of gadgets, one of which was the fitting of a second machine-gun to the Vickers Fighter aeroplane. This almost doubled that machine's efficiency as a fighting instrument. (In a Vicker's Fighter the observer sat in the nose of the aeroplane, and the pilot was in a separate cockpit behind him. The observer had the only gun. This was too much for Loraine. He had to have something to fire, if only for the noise of it. So he had a high rod—or gun-mounting—fitted by his seat, with a swivel-fitting at the top on which was fixed the machine-gun. This he could fire, but —being in control of the machine and the gun being well above him—he could not rise to unjam or reload it. His observer had to do that for him, a fact which led to a lot of grim humour in the course of aerial combat.) Still, the device was generally accepted, and on the day the Brass Hats came down from Headquarters to inspect it, as Loraine swung up into his machine to demonstrate, our Adjutant remarked to the General in all seriousness: "A marvellous old man, you see, sir. Gets into his plane without the help of a ladder."

"Now he'd said this with some affection and pride, as we rather admired Loraine's gadgets, so that when old Bobbie came down and the General repeated it to him, we couldn't think why they both burst out laughing.

"He was a grand talker. Time and again I saw him enter the Mess when lads were buried in their periodicals and newspapers, and begin talking to one of them. It didn't matter on what subject, all papers would drop, and presently every one of us would be listening to him intently.

"We had to admit there was something in Loraine.

"Yet he was such a mix-up of contrasts: so contradictory. He knew all there was to know in theory about an engine, but treated his brutally. We always knew when Bobbie was going up. If any of us went out to our machines, you would hear 'Brr-up . . . Brr-up . . . Brr-up' as we allowed the oil to circulate before letting the engine out. But with Loraine it was: "Contac'—Contact," and then: "*Brr . . . . . up-up-up*," until men rushed out of their huts with their watches, or stopped their ears, wondering how long he was

going to keep it up. Terrible treatment for the engine. He never seemed to remember that his life depended on that engine. He only knew he wanted to go up.

"Two Scout machines were sent to B Squadron. It was the pride and ambition of every Flying Officer in those days *prior to the formation of Scout Squadrons* to be the Scout pilot of the unit. This is what it meant: After coming down from the routine patrol, your special machine was brought out, ready tuned. You waited by till the wireless operator rushed out at you with an S.O.S. from some spot on the line that was being attacked by hostile aircraft. Then off you would go to try and repel them, as the Scout fighter. Loraine and I were both Scout fighters. He had a D.M.2, I had an F.E.8. The machines were equal in performance. We would often take off into the wind together, but whereas I would mount rapidly to a thousand feet, Loraine would be still at 150 ft., crawling along the earth, it seemed. He always mounted slowly, having learned the lesson of the early pioneers: 'Don't lose flying speed.' A finger and thumb touch, just the feel of the joy-stick between finger and thumb, would tell other pilots when their machines were likely to stall. But Loraine always held the joy-stick with his fist, as a barmaid draws a pint. When he was fighting he forgot all about his engine. It meant nothing to him that his engine over-revved when diving. On a dive after German aircraft with Lubbock, the engine over-revved hopelessly and gave out on him. Yet he was a good fighter, although it was a marvel to me that, being so ham-fisted, he came through.

"I remember when it came my turn to go on leave, I went and asked the C.O. that no one should fly the F.E.8. while I was away. "I can't promise you that," he said. "But no one will fly it except Loraine." That was enough for me. I did not go on leave. The C.O. thought I was extraordinarily keen. Nothing of the kind, I couldn't bear the machine—the pride of my life—to be mishandled by Loraine.

"When he was promoted Commander of A. Flight, I succeeded him as Commander of B. Flight. This put me in an awful stew. To be a Commander at twenty! I felt I could

never do justice to the job. I consulted Loraine. The man, not the officer, was a father to me. "Don't feel diffident, Poello," said he. "Think of it this way—if there was a Round Robin among the lads, who would they select as Flight-Commander—*you*." He gave me confidence as no one else could.

"In fairness, there was one point we appreciated about the *officer*, Loraine. However tough he might be to his pilots, let some one from outside attack them, and they sprouted wings. *There were no men like his men*, that was the attitude. He shouldered any blame, took the whole force of any rebuke like a rock of Gibraltar, and if so much as spray ever reached an officer behind him, you may be sure that man deserved it."

In March, 1916, Robert went back to England to train at Gosport on the highly-specialised machines designed in answer to the Fokker. And in August, 1916, he returned in command of his own personally-selected Squadron of Single-seater Fighting F.E.8.'s.

In these sat the pilots he had selected, too.

New and shining they flew over to France . . . and alighted at the aerodrome of Trezennes, near the town of Aire, 20 kilometres from St. Omer.

. . . . . .

This was 40 *Squadron* . . . of whom it was to be said: "They helped greatly to hold on when the scarcity of machines on our side was very serious."

(Note: The scarcity was in Spring 1917, as yet it was only August, 1916.)

"Immediately before leaving Gosport every machine had been taken to Workshops, the engine taken out, cleaned, put on the test bench and run to its maximum. The engine was then put into its machine and the plane wheeled to the hangar, ready for departure.

"Each flying officer had to stand by his machine whilst this was being done and thereafter sign a certificate to say he had done so. (Ordered by Major Loraine.) Needless to say all the machines of 40 Squadron landed in France without mishap, and were in first-class condition to start work next day." (Record of that period.)

Another record from Gosport just before departure, mentions: "Major Loraine took up 'planes in the dark every night this week and landed them into a beam playing low along the ground. He had every pilot belonging to 40 Squadron do the same." (Shortly after this, night-flying became part of the regular training of every fighting pilot; but when Robert started it for 40 Squadron, it was an innovation.)

He was animated by a tremendous desire to make 40 the finest fighting Squadron in the Field. Every Squadron-commander, was of course, animated by the same desire, and had his own way of working towards that end. Robert never spared himself. Perhaps he too seldom spared his men. But whatever his merits or de-merits as a Commander, during the winter of 1916, 40 Squadron was recognised as one of the most efficient units in the R.F.C.

The machines were F.E.8's, very small single-seater scouting 'planes, fast for their day, with French Mono-soupape engines placed immediately behind the pilot's seat, giving special speed and climb. They had one machine-gun each, equipped with special gun-sights and special tracer—or incendiary—ammunition. (The personnel of the Squadron was 20 Flying Officers and about 175 other ranks—fitters, riggers, Motor-Transport drivers, sailmakers, clerks, etc.)

It was not a Squadron of photographic and reconnaissance machines, it was a squadron of 'planes designed to challenge and shoot down the Hun. That was their work. Owing to Robert's habit of discharging the work in hand and rarely keeping souvenirs, unless he was on holiday, few unofficial records of original 40 Squadron remain. A Major or C.O. of a Squadron never keeps an official log-book like a pilot or Flight-Commander; and Robert had no time to keep a diary. As for the others, the men were fighters, not writers; they vanished like meteors.

2/Lt. K. S. Henderson arrived, a strip of a lad of nineteen, brought down a Halberstadt the day after arriving, and was then himself crashed. That was the tale.

Comes a record, however, from Powell—that man with more than nine lives—who was Robert's Senior Flight-

commander, before he himself, proceeded to take command of 41 Squadron, at the age of 21.

Says Powell: "Loraine had a man named Usborne in 40 Squadron who, I am certain, would have brought the War to a close a year earlier, had his invention been accepted. He was Canadian, surnamed the Gadget King. As soon as the Germans started using liquid fire on the ground, Usborne thought of fixing a cylinder above the rudder of his aeroplane, which, at the pressure of a button on his instrument board, would shoot *back* liquid fire at any Hun who was on his tail. (The idea in aerial combat is, of course, to get on the other fellow's tail: then you can shoot him down at your leisure, as he finds it difficult to shake you off.) Usborne proved that this liquid fire could not damage his own machine—going at seventy miles an hour he was bound to leave it—all he had to do was to fly straight and his pursuers would automatically come into his line of fire. The gadget seemed fool-proof. We were very excited.

"Brass Hats arrived to watch Usborne demonstrate. But whether it was that he had only fitted a rocket to illustrate the fire cylinder, which gave off little puffs of blue smoke, and the Brass Hats could not visualise the effect from this, or whether it was as one of them said: "This isn't cricket." I don't know. We heard nothing more after the visit."

To give an idea of the type of man Robert relied on in 40 Squadron: Powell had joined the unit on crutches. He had smashed an ankle entering the ground at 200 miles an hour. By rights he should have been killed as he had tried to loop off the ground on rising. (This became a common enough trick in after-War days on machines with engines giving 400 and 500 h.p., but Powell had essayed it on 80 h.p. and, naturally enough, curved back into the earth.)

As soon as his ankle was mended, he went up at Trezennes, reported all well with him, and took his Flight off on patrol. They crossed the lines at 10,000. Archie began to come thick, as always, but this time Archie explosions seemed to affect his mind. "All the horror of my accident suddenly returned," says he. "I tried to dodge Archie, but found I was incapable

of bending a wing-tip. Each time I tried to pull my lever to right or to left, I could see the earth come rushing up towards me, as in my crash, and my arm refused to move, *I could not do it.* Behind me came the Flight, like a diamond, flying level. The sweat was pouring off me. I knew one of the fellows was bound to get it in the neck, unless they dodged pretty quickly, and they could not dodge while I was flying level. So I pulled out my Very pistol and fired White Lights, signifying: Wash-out. Immediately they banked and swerved down left on patrol, while I headed on straight for Germany."

Eventually, Powell gained sufficient control to make a flat turn, and veering flatly and continually he re-crossed the lines down South at St. Quentin (he had gone over them as far North as Aire), and then pancaked back to the aerodrome at Trezennes. "There was a whoop as I landed, as every one thought I was done for,"[1] he says, "but I rushed past them to Loraine, almost falling into his office. 'It's all up with me as a Scout,' I said. 'I'll have to transfer to a Bomber Squadron or an Asylum, something in my brain has snapped.' I shall never forget his reply: 'Nonsense, Poello, boy,' he said, patting me gently. 'All you need is—*rest.*' The absolute assurance in his tone cured me—a few days later I was right as rain."

Robert did not always show such understanding to pilots who suffered from nerve-crisis; he was usually a difficult C.O. to whom to bring an excuse; but he knew Powell was fearless. All these Scout pilots were overstrung lads: only a nervous temperament could respond to the speed required in air-fighting. And Powell was astonishing. On his next but one flight, this lad led an escort to a Bombing Raid. "The great Bombing machines circled slowly, mounting to 10,000 feet over the rendezvous," he reports, "the F.E.8's rocketed above them to 14,000, my engine being so well tuned it soared to 17,000. Then the Bomber-leader fired a signal and we moved off.

"I was feeling horribly cold at 17,000, although we were flying into the sun, and was just dipping into my chest pocket

[1]That he came through this adventure with impunity is proof of the Allied air supremacy in late 1916.

Some of the pilots of original Forty Squadron. Major Robert Loraine, M.C., centre (seated); on his right Capt. D. O. Mulholland (seated); between them, standing, Lieut. C. O. Usborne, the Gadget King.
Taken at Gosport before leaving for France, August, 1916.

to draw out a nip, when I saw the razor front of a machine coming head on to me. We were level, and there was no way of telling whether he had a Black Cross or Allied Circle on his wings, until . . . *put, put, put, put, put* . . . came his bullets as he flashed past on my left, so close, I could see his goggles. The instinct is always to flash after your assailant in these encounters, and then the ' waltzing ' begins. But I had been thinking moves out, down below; with tremendous determination I swerved to the right, instead, and came head on to him before he expected me, about fifty feet above him, too, as he had lost height on his wheel. *Put, put, put-put-put* . . . I went, being just able to hoist up and deflect my machine-gun down in the supreme excitement, although it had not yet been unloosed from its moorings . . . he fell like a stone. Down he went through the strata of my flight, and *all the boys there fired at him.* On, through the Bombers at 10,000, right through their centre, and every observer in those machines *stood up and fired at him.* How they didn't fire into each other's machines and explode each other's bombs, I can't think. They could never have been in such danger. They looked so crazy, and what they were doing was so crazy, if I hadn't been strapped in, I'd have fallen out of my seat with mirth. You poor saps, I thought. That's it, it was a Young Man's War in the Air. All you needed was a sense of the ridiculous and the wit to manœuvre, anything else was an encumbrance. . . . . . Bobbie Loraine got hold of a splendid toy, just then. The Flying Corps had been presented with super-rockets, which the C.O.'s were to let off at dusk, to guide stragglers back to the aerodrome. I was coming in from patrol one evening—it was still light in the sky—but dark on the ground, when Pfft . . . PFFT, up went one of these rockets. I was furious, more livid than the rocket. Here was I with my Flight hanging hard on to my tail, nicknamed The Bloke who knows his Way Home, after eighteen months' continuous flying in France, actually being shown the way to the aerodrome when I was staring down at it. It was insulting, and just like Loraine's officiousness, I thought, always so occupied was he in being efficient. Couldn't he have remembered it was *me* in the air. I looked at

my watch. If we'd had enough petrol I would have landed that Flight on any other aerodrome but ours. Pfft . . . PFFT, up went another. I didn't know what to do. Men's tempers were curious things in France. We didn't hate or envy each other for each other's wives, or money, or position, none of the usual values. But a fellow had to be left his *pride*. Take away his arrogance, and what is there left in any fighter? And here was Loraine stealing away every ounce of my self-respect. Suddenly, all over the aerodrome, Pfft . . . pfft . . . PFFT . . . PFFT . . . PFFT . . . ROCKETS, the grandest display of fireworks outside an erupting volcano, at every angle, at every height, along the ground, all ways, with firebells ringing, and a terrific commotion. Loraine had discharged one into a stack of spares. Imagine it, I never laughed so much in my life, the sight was incredible, we were kept five minutes longer in the air, because we couldn't land on ground that was ablaze. That he didn't set the hangars and workshop on fire was his own good fortune. We were quite helpless with laughter when we got down. For days after that Loraine's place at dinner was decorated with crackers, and the lads let off squibs to guide him on his way to Mess. The joke lasted till we had a real fire, one that was frightening.

"Snow was thick on the ground, when a mechanic who was filling the engines with petrol for the dawn patrol, had his memory numbed by the cold and lit a match to see how much he had put in. There was an explosion, a sheet of flame, so vivid it wakened us before the fire-bell; all the tracer (incendiary) ammunition went off in the aeroplanes, each one firing into the next one's engines and petrol tanks, so that, in spite of every man rushing out almost simultaneously, we had three machines, and several lorries and the workshop gutted, in less time than it takes to write it. Ten days hard work followed before we were back to strength, WORK as only Loraine understood it."

Here, it is interesting to refer to the records of a groundsman, Corporal—later Flight Sergeant—Robert Muir, which throw a light on the men's point of view on the work in the Squadron, although they do not refer to the fire.

"The Major was at all times 100% Efficiency," says Flight-Sergeant Robert Muir, in his memories of 40 Squadron. "Engines and machines when unserviceable had to be rendered serviceable with the utmost speed. Fitters and riggers had to work unceasingly, night and day, until machines were fit to take the air. The Major had much pushing to do. He pushed the men and the officers, I believe, all the time, and was not always popular. But he never failed to take an interest in the men's messing and general conditions. He was probably one of the few Field Officers who ever entered the cookhouse at Gosport to inspect and sample the men's food.[1] After that he personally supervised the weekly diet sheet submitted by the Sergeant-cook, and arranged that in spite of the difficulties of obtaining a variety of food, the most varied should be obtained. In France, he ordered a canteen to be opened for the Squadron, the profits from which were used to buy fresh vegetables from the villages nearby, to amplify and vary the men's messing.

"*I state emphatically that no body of men were better fed or looked after than the men of* 40 *Squadron.*

"But few men can have had more work to do.

"In the winter of 1917—during weather of unprecedented severity, when flying was impossible and mechanics and hands at other aerodromes were having a rest—he ordered that stores, tents, machines, kit, everything be packed, and the Squadron prepare to do *a practice move.*

"No one had ever heard of such a thing. From the time the signal was sounded on the klaxon horn, everything was to be ready in less than an hour, *and was ready.* Then, led by the Major, we moved off, and did a circuit of about four miles and returned, unpacked and settled on the same ground again. Of course, some of us felt fine fools. The language was awful, and we were all dead beat. It was not a popular event, but as an aid to 100% Efficiency, it could not have been surpassed. I had only to breathe the words, 'practice move' to men after that, for everything to be in apple-pie order."

[1]How well he must have remembered his Trooper days.

Robert must have wished the Squadron to avoid the pitfalls he, himself, had encountered during the move North in 1914. Besides, for weeks on end early in 1917, weather cancelled flying and work had to be found for the Squadron. Records of other Squadrons—notably the famous 24 Squadron —refer to their days of 'sloth and unutterable idleness' at this time.

Earlier on in the winter, Major-General Trenchard, Commading Royal Flying Corps in the Field, had visited 40 Squadron, on October 26th, 1916, and in his communiqué next day to the Flying Corps, said:

"I visited 40 Squadron yesterday, and was much struck by the extraordinarily fine organisation in the Squadron, also by the excellent method and cleanliness in regard to machines, workshops, transport and sheds." (All superlatives!)

"On this occasion," notes Flight-Sergeant Muir, "all the machines were lined up on the aerodrome, the pilots in their seats, fitters and riggers beside their particular machines. At the sound of a prearranged signal from a klaxon, every machine took off, one after the other. To-day this is less than a commonplace, but *then* it was a wonder."

(This was clearly a manifestation of Robert's sense of the dramatic.)

The note on it from Major Powell is: "Although these innovations later became part of the routine of the Flying Corps, and then of the Royal Air Service, at the time they only tended to make Loraine unpopular, as they were proof of a sense of show, and they also suborned pilots, who regarded themselves as a privileged band of merry knight errants, to *drill and discipline.*"

The reason for Major-General Trenchard visiting the Squadron was because *40* had crashed five Huns on October 22nd, four days before. As he had then wired: "Please congratulate all pilots concerned. It is good work."

Very stirring it is to read the Squadron's Hun-strafing records, picked out at random, even two days before October 22nd, as shown in the way they were made out.

CRASHED	PROBABLY CRASHED	DRIVEN DOWN
Fokker Monoplane 20-10-16 Capt. D. O. Mulholland.	Fokker Monoplane 20-10-16 Capt. D. O. Mulholland. Roland Scout 20-10-16 Lt. E. L. Benbow.	Roland Scout 20-10-16 2/Lt. S. A. Sharpe.
Roland Scout 21-10-16 Capt. T. Mapplebeck	Monoplane 21-10-16 Lt. C. O. Usborne	Roland Scout 21-10-16 Lt. E. L. Benbow. Unrecognised 2/Lt. J. Hay. Fokker Biplane 2/Lt. R. E. Neve. Roland Scout 2/Lt. J. Hay. Roland Scout Lt. D. de Burgh.

Ball, V.C. left it on record that the redoubtable Fokkers were out of date in the Autumn of 1916. ' The best German machine now,' he said, ' is the Roland Scout. Her guns fire backwards and forwards and every way except below. . . .'

In these two days' records, one Roland Scout is crashed (utterly destroyed), one probably crashed, and four driven down. At last the British had machines in which they could meet and beat the Hun. Fights now took place above the Fokker's ceiling, often at an altitude of 16,000 feet. Instead of Fokkers diving out of the heights, they were dived upon. In the tense, never-ending, see-saw struggle for air-supremacy, the British

had it all their own way in the Winter of 1916-17. Dominion was to be wrested from them again in the Spring of 1917, when the Germans launched new and *still more powerful* machines; but even so, the enemy were never to recapture their previous overwhelming air superiority.

The excellence of British aeroplanes in the Autumn of 1916 had brought Ball and McCudden to overthrow the air-fighting records of Immelman and Boelcke. Broken was the legend of German air-invincibility. With the advent of more and more powerful machines, a race of great air-fighters sprang up on all sides. There was not only Richthofen of the razzle-dazzle Travelling Star-Circus, and Voss; but also Guynemeyer of the French Storks, Fonck and Garros; Ball, McCudden and Bishop, V.C.'s. All of them men who were machine-made-perfect air-spirits, Vikings of the 20th century.

Robert never flew with 40 Squadron. It was not the practice at that time in the War for Majors to fly (with the exception of Major Lanoe-Hawker, V.C., who was crashed by Richthofen), they were responsible for the organisation of their Squadrons. It is also doubtful whether he could have taken proper advantage of the new machines, which were pre-eminently designed for stunting, and answered a pilot's slightest move with lightning flexibility. He was never good at aerobatics.

Although Brancker[1] mentions him in the same breath as Ball—not on the same level—but in the same breath, as two heavy-handed pilots who overcame their clumsiness at the start; Ball became one of the finest fighting pilots ever seen, Robert remained enterprising, that was his spirit, but undeft and short-sighted. Ball had the flaming impetuousness of a boy of twenty, Loraine was forty. He could never approach the tactics of the star-pilots, he hadn't the tricks, the lungs or the gunnery.

Aerobatics do not count, says Richthofen; but aerobatics

[1]Extract from Air Vice-Marshal Sir Sefton Brancker's Memoirs: "Some of our very best pilots started very badly. For instance, Ball, who was one of the finest fighting pilots ever seen, was very heavy-handed at first, and would have been turned down altogether but for his obvious courage and extraordinary keenness. Robert Loraine was another who at the beginning of the War was sent out as an observer, because he was considered too difficult to train as a pilot on the few machines at our disposal. Later, eventually turned into a very fine fighting pilot."

saved Richthofen's brother time and again and placed him in a better position to attack his prey, as they saved other men. All the star-pilots were masters of spins and falls and rolls and turns. It is never the tricks that matter, but the aggressiveness of the man in the box (machine) *his will to do*! said Richthofen. It can only have been Robert's aggressiveness in previous encounters that brought him through without being crashed by the Hun.

Certainly, in planning tactics his *will to do* enabled him to outwit the enemy, as the following report dispatched when he was in command of the 14th Wing R.F.C. in June 1917, clearly shows.

The engagement it describes changed the tactics on the British Front for several weeks to come, at a time when aerial supremacy was passing to the enemy and strategy had grown stale.[1]

HEADQUARTERS,
14th WING R.F.C.

Confidential.

TO THE G.O.C.
4th BRIGADE. ROYAL FLYING CORPS.

SIR,—I have the honour to report that the general action fought this morning between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., East and South-East of CAMBRAI, which resulted in the complete routing of the enemy, was not a suddenly-conceived offensive of the enemy, but an outcome of our daily reconnaissance for his railway movement.

Until recently, I carried out this reconnaissance with six F.E.'s escorted by six Sopwith Scouts.[2] But in view of the increasingly-determined attempts of the enemy to interfere with this reconnaissance, I decided to double the number of escorting Sopwith Scouts and reduce the F.E.'s to two. (The

[1]Again, characteristically, Robert forgot all about the fight this mentions. When a copy of the document was sent him in 1926 from the Air Historical Branch where it had been filed for reference, it failed to recall the event to his mind.

[2]Sopwith Scouts were by this time the advanced machines.

remaining four F.E.'s becoming an encumbrance to the escort as soon as fighting became severe.)

I found this formation of two F.E.'s and 12 Sopwith Scouts strong enough for the duty until June 4th, when they were attacked by about thirty hostile machines. Although the enemy did not entirely succeed in preventing the reconnaissance from being done, he interfered badly with the work and finally drove my machines back over their own lines. One of the F.E.'s was shot through the petrol tank, and was just able to glide to our side, and one of the escorting Sopwith Scouts was shot down in enemy country.

As a result of this (his) successful action on the morning of June 4th (yesterday), in which most of my machines had been disabled, the enemy was active and aggressive all day. He crossed our lines several times, and one machine came straight over my Headquarters, proceeding in a North-Westerly direction.

I came to the conclusion that he would certainly be waiting to attack my reconnaissance again with a strong force at dawn this morning.

I therefore sent the reconnaissance up one hour later than the day before, so that his force would have been some time in the air before coming into action.[1] I also sent an escort in two groups, one of 11 Nieuport Scouts and one of 16 Sopwith Scouts. The first to stay with the reconnaissance machines, and the second to be as high as possible, ready to dive into the fight as soon as action was joined.

As was foreseen, a strong force of enemy machines was in the air when my reconnaissance and escort crossed the line, and a running fight commenced in the course of which one of my reconnaissance machines was forced to land in enemy country, near CREVECŒUR, and the pilot (Lieut. Chalmers) was seen to set fire promptly to his machine.

Notwithstanding this casualty, the reconnaissance was thoroughly and completely done by the other F.E., while the escorting machines fought a general engagement which lasted continuously for fifty minutes.

[1]Enemy petrol consequently shorter.

The attacking force was reinforced by machines which rose from the enemy's Aerodromes between CAMBRAI and LE CATEAU, and while it is difficult to estimate accurately the number of the enemy, from the pilots' accounts it would appear that between thirty and forty hostile aircraft were engaged.

There is great difficulty also in assigning justly the destruction of enemy machines to individual pilots, owing to the heat of the mêlée, but *all* the enemy's machines were driven down, so that after nearly one hour's fighting, our machines patrolled between CAMBRAI and LE CATEAU over the aerodromes of CARNIÈRES, ROUSIÈRES, QUIÈVY, and NEUVILLY, and could not find a single German machine to fight.

The enemy has not yet recovered from this defeat as my photographic reconnaissance this morning, later, experienced no interference whatever, and my offensive patrols have been unable to find a single fighting machine, only having seen two 2-seater Albatrosses attempting to do a wireless shoot, both of which ran away directly they were approached.

In addition the 3rd and 4th Balloon Wing inform me that their machines have worked all day without interference, so that it would appear that the encounter of this morning was all that was needed to keep the enemy on the floor for the day.

I submit that *this principle of seeking, and if necessary, provoking a decisive engagement daily*, is more profitable an employment of the Forces of an Army Wing than attempting to guard the Army Front with feeble patrols all day long.

While all did well, the following officers' work was especially good:

(1) Captain J. C. Russell, leading Sopwith Scouts.

(2) Acting Squadron-Commander Draper, leading Nieuport Scouts.

(3) Lieut. O. M. Sutton.

(4) Lieut. Chalmers (for so promptly lighting his machine).

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
R. LORAINE.
Lieut.-Colonel.
O.C. 14th Wing. R.F.C.

In the Field.
5th June, 1917.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE time of that despatch he was a Lieut.-Colonel and had been awarded the D.S.O. He had left 40 Squadron in February, gone home on leave, and come back to command the 14th Wing in March. Now it was June.

The fiercest, most determined struggle yet, was proceeding between the German and British forces for mastery of the Air. Air-supremacy had been recognised by either side as the winning factor. But although he was acutely concerned with this struggle—as was every Flying-officer,[1] let alone the Commander of a Wing—now that the death-grapple had joined, Robert derived no joy from it.

He had changed. Smart had been killed.

Smart had been killed on an afternoon before he was to dine with Robert. Just as when Robert was shot, it had been in the afternoon before he was to dine with Smart. But with Smart the shot was final. He would never speak again.

The shock to Robert was immeasureable. It was dulled by the funeral rites—he buried Smart ceremoniously—and grief was even temporarily sublimated on the notes of the Last Post. No sound more beautiful, Robert thought, than the silver notes of the Last Post. He had come back to the customary binge in the Mess; Smart had been killed while he was with 40 Squadron. No matter who was killed, there was a *beano* every night in 40 Squadron,[2] just as there was a beano in the Mess of every other Squadron.

Robert always led the merry-making. He shepherded his lads to the piano, and, "Sing, sing, sing," he commanded.

[1]The records of 24 Squadron, one of the Squadrons belonging to the Wing, say that pilots felt as boxers do before entering the ring for a big fight.

[2]"There had to be," says Powell, "as lads came in from fighting feeling they had lost their brothers, when their comrades had fallen. Life was not worth living, nothing was worth doing; the outlook was completely defeatist. Grief had to be shown up for what it was: a form of self-pity. The dead, after all, were not suffering; it was our loss we mourned. Our loss was the enemy's gain. Could that be tolerated? No—on, on, on!"

"Louder, *louder*, LOUDER." Brave spirits were not to be mourned.

That was the theory. That was the practice.

But after the binge, and during the day, when messages from Smart failed to appear, his sense of loss reasserted itself. Smart had meant much, done much for him, lovely had been their companionship. Lovely the years beyond recall! He wished he had produced a play by Smart. That was how they had first met: Smart had pressed a play into his hands just inside a stage-door. Robert had read and refused it, but Smart had come to his rooms subsequently to collect the script, and so had started their friendship. A friendship in which Smart had never failed to serve. He had continued to write plays down the years, and Robert had continued to refuse them . . . in flowed waves of self-reproach, Robert could not help them. A production would have meant so much to the dear chap. Fulfilment and recognition was what he had lacked in life. Robert could have given them to him. Could have, but did not. He had hesitated, waiting for Smart to write a ' winner.' Yet Smart had never hesitated in his service to him. Now, there was nothing he could do for Smart, nothing.

Memory and reproach nagged him far into the night, when, after the ' beano ' he returned to his desk with a wet towel round his head, to look again over the next day's offensive. Death was no stranger, but this was the first time Death had struck close to him. It did not make him wish to kill more of the enemy: it sickened him of slaughter.

The twist was sudden. It left him shattered, only half living. The Squadron went on just the same, Robert was such a martinet for efficiency, for duty. Later, there was the honour of the Wing to be maintained. But a terrible dread possessed him. His days were spent in fear, his nights were panic—which one of the men he knew would be taken next? He could scarcely bring himself to attend an Inter-squadron Swimming Sports, because the boys who were laughing and striving in the pool, would be crossing the line next morning. Or would they know a next morning—they might be sent up to Hun-straf that evening.

He, who had always preached the joy of battle, now hated the sound of it.

During his last days with 40 Squadron, he had to force himself to enter mess of an evening. When possible, he surrounded his end of the table with visitors, officers from other messes, so that he should not miss certain ' faces ' too quickly. ' Faces ' he had probably been rehearsing between whiles in *O' Flaherty, V.C.*[1] during the day, and now no longer faces.

After dinner and when the singing was over, he would return to his office, and write to the next of kin of those faces, informing wives, parents or sisters, that their men had crashed. He would go over and over these letters, a hand shading his eyes, the bottle of whisky beside him, trying to insert a sentence that would bring consolation, before he addressed them painstakingly to names and places blocked out in capitals on large white cards. Formerly, over-zealous batsmen had placed those cards on top of neat piles of blazers, squash-rackets, and other items which had belonged to the ' faces,' and ranged them along the desk, but this Robert could not stand, so now he was only faced by the cards.

In the small watches of the morning, when the red stove had burnt low, he would look up and see Smart sitting on a shadowy couch by the door, reading and making notes as he had used to in Robert's theatre dressing-room; and then Robert would keep very quiet for fear of disturbing him. He did not want Smart to go. He sat looking at him.

Whatever happened at night, plans for next day's offensive were clearly mapped out before dawn. The prestige of 40 Squadron continued to rise. Later, so did the prestige of the 14th Wing. Casualties were high, however. He hated waiting on the tarmac for the dawn reconnaissance to return, standing

[1]In February, 1917, Bernard Shaw was one of the distinguished visitors to make a semi-official tour of the British Front. He spent several days at Trezennes with 40 Squadron, and he attended a dress rehearsal of his play, *The Inca of Perusalem*, which was acted by the men. *O' Flaherty, V.C.* was done by the officers. Says Major Powell M.C.: "I sat behind him in the empty Mess at this rehearsal. He laughed throughout the performance and enjoyed himself enormously. I thought it a curious sight to see an author laughing at his own jokes, and at the end leant over and said to him: ' I'm glad you appreciate our poor efforts at your play, sir.' He could scarcely speak for laughing. ' D'you know,' he said, ' if I had thought the stuff would prove to be as poor as this, I'd never have written it.' "

next to the Sergeant-Major, who would also be counting the machines in. Dawn reconnaissances were the worst. By sundown, the day had been lived, both the worst and the best were known. Robert's face could at least express what he felt in the dusk, as he paced alone between large purple flares lit to guide the stragglers in. Paced and searched the sky for the missing ones . . . his far-flung pigeons of death. How the poetry of life in the Flying Corps had always filled his soul. But he wished the chant of the Squadrons to be an epic, not a dirge; and poetry vanished altogether when he had been on the floor several months and watched others go to their death in the sky.

Back in his office, after the fighting, he would receive reports, and either congratulate or upbraid, feeling equally self-conscious at apportioning blame or praise, since he had not been present to judge the difficulties or share the risk. And this physical security, combined with an ever-increasing death-roll, was breaking him up in spirit, when the authorities decided he had seen enough active service, it was time he made a tour of the home establishments; a man so well-primed in tactics, they thought, was just the one to take charge of a training-station. So back he went to one of the large R.F.C. bases in England.

. . . . . .

It was a post from which he should certainly have been singled out for higher command. Indeed, as he had already risen from a 2nd Lieutenant to a Lieut.-Colonel, there was no knowing where he might end up in the Army. The Flying Corps was the place in which to get a move on, did a man survive; and this new command was a peach of a job. Some good friend must have had Loraine's interests at heart to hand him such an appointment. To mix all the sayings, another man would have thanked his stars and made hay while the sun shone: but not so, Robert.

The first morning, he took charge in July, 1917, only three out of thirty pilots under training, showed up. The others were sick. It transpired that some were away on indefinite sick leave. Robert was astounded. He had returned from an urgent

situation in France. The doctors he questioned about the absentees were hazy; presently they were astounded. The man previously in charge of the station had never regarded sickness as a crime, merely as an affliction of health; besides, as every one knew, many of the absentees were sons of influential people who had to be treated with care. Robert did not know, it only added to his impatience and disgust when he was told. The absent fledgelings were recalled, and the backward brood thrust unceremoniously into the air.

"For the next eight months he became the most unpopular man in the Flying Corps in England," says C. G. Grey, Editor of the *Aeroplane*, "men at his Station had to fly whether they liked it or not. The result was rather a high casualty list, although nothing like so high as rumour attributed to him. In those days people who volunteered to fly were still regarded as heroes, and your young hero does not like being ordered about and bullied into the air. But Bob Loraine never asked anybody to fly a machine he would not fly himself; and, knowing his own badness as a pilot, he argued that if he could fly a certain aeroplane, anybody else could fly it." [1]

That is rather glossing over facts. Robert, at the Training Station, achieved a reputation for sheer unmitigated brutality. A little tact, a little compromise, would have brought him away from the school with flying colours. But, as usual, he took the extreme view and blazed away indignantly, doing himself much harm and no good to others.

Mindful of Curly Evans who had been rejected during the early days of the Flying Corps: seeking in these pale-faced youths, some reflection of Lubbock's high courage, he shot the 'shrink-backs' off the ground, regardless of the fact that this was not the best way to teach them to fly, as it did not instil confidence. They loathed him.

He was obsessed by one idea. If men like these had been considered good enough to train for the Flying Corps, they would prove themselves worthy of it. Did they tell him a

[1]Further comment from C. G. Grey: 'The R.A.F. could do with a few disciplinarians of his type to-day, now that all sorts of unlicked youngsters are coming into it.'

plane was not good enough to fly, he sent for the plane, inspected it and flew it himself. This was reprehensible, for as head of the Station he had no right to take risks. When he came down he sent the pupil up in it. In this way several accidents occurred: planes crashed with pupils after Robert had been up in them.

This led to the story that he had tampered with the planes. A supposition that could not be entertained by any one who knew the man. It was too absurd; but it prevailed.

Oddly enough, for he must so often have been asked for official explanations, he remained in charge of the training centre until he blew up with indignation, and asked to *revert in rank to a Major* and be given a Squadron in France. This time he meant to fly, too. He would not endure the self-reproach of sending up others to brave risks he was spared. As for his soft job at the training centre, he would sooner be shot down a thousand times, than supervise the training of ' unmentionables,' who did not wish to be schooled. He returned to a Squadron of Bombers at the Front in May, 1918.

. . . . . .

In this way, he, who had seen the first ten toy fighting-planes go up in 1914, now saw the sky darkened with almost 300 times their number, high-powered. Whereas it had been a matter of one plane fighting another in 1915, there were monster dog-fights now, in which upwards of 100 planes were engaged. Flying machines were used for almost every purpose, *not only for reconnaissance*, but also for machine-gunning troops along the trenches. They had been used in the capacity of ' winged guns ' during the German push in early Spring 1918, to sweep roads and fields with lead and prevent the enemy from bringing up reinforcements. Whole portions of the Allied Front had been held by the Fighting Squadrons alone. Had been, and were still being held when Robert arrived in France, for although the main enemy advance had been defeated, pressure was still severe.

But the Allies were gaining a definite *air*-ascendancy, which was to be a decisive factor. Von Richthofen had been crashed at Bertangles, and his death was a severe blow to the morale

of the German Air Force. Few of the enemy's Air Aces remained, and among these none were leaders. Allied patrols had it pretty much their own way, till a Jägdstäffel (German chaser formation) appeared, and then—then there would be one of those monster Dog-fights in which machines rained in and out of the sky.

Robert was glad to be out of these dog-fights for the most part. He was attached to a Night-bomber Squadron. He could not have led a Fighting Squadron with zest or inspiration: although he had led a Flight of Fighters in 1915. He would not have chosen to sit over Archie in these days, as he had sat back in 1914 with Pilots Dunn and Corbett-Wilson. Chiefly, because he would not have been able to invest the issue with the same importance. Yet issues were every bit as important as they ever had been—it was simply that repetition had dulled their significance.

And it was not that alone.

Who was there now left to fight for, to fight with? All those who had splashed life's day with gorgeous colour had gone—even Powell, that man with numberless lives, had been shot down and taken prisoner—the air was grey. Bitterly, he reproved himself for grieving: brave spirits should not be mourned. He toasted them, as was the custom, but for all his overdone cheerfulness, could not recover from their loss.

Inwardly morose and sullen, the work of long-distance night-bombing suited him. He did not wholly see what he destroyed. (The fun of destruction had long since passed.) If he happened to come in for a dog-fight on the return journey, when bombers and escort were revealed to the Hun by some untimely dawn, then his tactics were guided by Smart moving just ahead of the propeller. Smart, who had often guided him when he was alive, guided him still though he was dead. Robert always maintained that Smart led him during his last two months service in France—who knows? He was but a shell of the man he had been, and whisky alone could not have kept him going. Yet it was at this time he received a bar to his D.S.O.

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July 25, 1918, saw Bernard Shaw writing this letter.

"I have just received an official telegram announcing that you have been and done it again, or rather that the Huns have. What is the use of being a Major if you have to put yourself in the way of Archies like a common lieutenant? We both find ourselves much concerned.

"I hope it is not as bad as last time, and cling rather to the fact that the telegram does not say seriously or dangerously wounded. 'Reported wounded on July 20th particulars follow when received,' is the wording. Anyhow, you are alive. I find myself repeating the lines from Lear:

> "Hadst thou been Gossamer! Feathers! Air!
> So many fathoms down precipitating,
> Thoudst shiver like an egg."

"You would produce that impression by sheer dramatic power if you had only fallen two feet.

"We are both on the point of starting for our annual holiday, I to various places in England, Charlotte to Ireland. Therefore letters will take from one to three days longer to reach us than in London.

"I hope they send those particulars soon, and that it is a cushy one this time. You are going too far with this silly soldiering. I have written a play with intervals of thousands of years (in the future) between the acts; but now I find I must make each act into a full-length play. And this is the time you select to stop another bullet! The devil take the War!

Ever,

"G.B.S."

"4th August, 1918.

"My Dear Loraine,—News at last. Gunshot wound in the left knee-joint. Lady Scott, who is making a statuette of me, and putting me up here for ten days accordingly, explains cheerfully: 'Oh, tell him to be sure not to take any leg they recommend at Roehampton,' and proceeds to entertain me with stories of a friend of hers who got a proper Ernst leg,

and he plays tennis and bicycles with it, without giving it away. I trust it is not necessary to rush to conclusions in this fashion; still, if the worst comes to the worst, I suppose one can play Hamlet with a property leg as well as lawn tennis. Why the devil need they have hit you in the knee-joint? The shin would have served their purpose just as well."

Later.

"I spent eighteen months on crutches, unable to put my foot to the ground—left foot it was, too. But in that period produced *Cæsar and Cleopatra* and *The Perfect Wagnerite*; and I cannot remember that I was in the least less happy than at other times. After all, having two available legs, I have never groused because I have not three; so why should the man with one be wretched because he has not two?

"These are the cheering remarks one makes now to the sacrifices of this horrible war. They must make you long to bomb Britain from the nearest Handley-Page.

"A speedy deliverance to you.—Ever,

"G. Bernard Shaw."

The shattering of his knee-cap had smacked Robert into existence. Before that he would not have minded if he were killed. But now that he had a good Blighty and was obviously meant to go on living, he had enough sense to see that life would not be worth while as a crock. So when the doctors in France wished to cut off his leg, on the grounds that it would save him from gangrene and a host of complications, he fought like a madman to keep the stump, and declared he would prefer a London opinion. He knew that overworked doctors at the base were only too ready to amputate.

He allowed them to extract three sharp twisted bullets and that was all. Pain was acting as a brain stimulant, although he was driven half insane by the agony. Not only had his knee-cap been shot clean away, but also the knuckle end of the bones, so that there was no knee-joint. Doctors were emphatic in their opinion that his leg would have to come off; there was nothing else for it. But he held on to it and

wrote to Shaw for advice. Shaw replied from the Fabian Summer School in Radnorshire:

"Your letter of the 31st has just arrived. I don't know what to say about the leg. If you lose it, an artificial leg of the best sort will carry you to victory as Henry V. If you don't and are lame, it means a lifetime of Richard III, unless I write a play entitled *Byron.*

"Then there is the pension. How much for a leg? How much for a limb? One must look at these things from a business point of view. An ordinary man is more disabled by losing a leg than by laming it—and pensions proceed on that assumption—but an actor may be more disabled by a crooked leg than by a cork one.

"How about flying?

"It seems to me that when it comes to aerial combat, the more of you that is artificial the better. Wells' Martian, a brain in a machine, is the ideal. You could carry spare limbs and replace damaged ones whilst you were volplaning. A dozen bullets through an artificial shin would move you to nothing but a Mephistophelean laugh.

"If we did not die of laughter at the humours of war we should of horror. Europe, in fact, *is* dying of horror, to a considerable extent, though she does not know it.

"The question is, what are you going to do when they set you on your legs? The first flight to America remains unachieved. You have done enough Richthofening for honour; and I like not such grinning honour as Richthofen hath. There still remains Columbus to emulate. You have, God forgive you, bombed enough German homesteads to fill ten pages of the Recording Angel's debit column; and it behoves you to start a credit by drying up the Atlantic for ever. The world will be full of such jobs for bold men for a long time to come; and the expiatory soldier will find his chance in them. I no longer think of you as an actor, except as a joke or a reminiscence.

"Talking of that, Ricketts exhibited at the International so splendidly romantic a picture of 'Don Juan and the Statue,' that, stony broke as I am, I believe I should have bought it

and presented it to you if somebody had not got beforehand with me on the first day of the show and saved me £300. And the costume was not in the least like the elegant confection with which he clothed your radiant youth at the Court Theatre, but a luridly magnificent one of rich velvets of the sort you wanted. So the laugh is with you after all.

"Perhaps this letter will reach Dunkirk after you have left. Try for Bournemouth; don't let them stick you in London now that nobody is there. Even if you had to overstay the holiday time, you would have to balance the visits of your friends against those of the hovering Hun on moonless nights. I have quite lost the iron nerve with which I faced the bombs of Ypres and Arras; the raids now terrify me into heart-rending palpitations; and I am too lazy to go down into the excellent Adelphi cellars.

"I must stop to catch the post.—Ever,

"G. Bernard Shaw."

A jolly letter; but, as far as practical advice was concerned, no help at all. But, then, how could one man settle for another whether he was to keep his leg or have it off?

Robert still held on to his stump, and in London, where he arrived in the middle of August, doctors were of opinion that, as no rot had set in, it would be wisest to keep it permanently.

Accordingly the leg was set and encased in plaster of Paris; and in plaster of Paris it was to be kept, immovable, for five months. So, as he experienced some surcease from pain with the new setting, for two days all was serene; then he learned in casual conversation with the doctor that at the end of the five months his muscles would have knit in such a manner that the limb would be stiff for ever and he would be unable to bend it at the knee.

Greatly incensed, for a stiff leg would be no use to him, he broke the plaster of Paris there and then; and, actuated by some desperate instinct, seized and deliberately bent his stump inwards at the knee, so afraid was he that muscle-knitting might have already caused it to stiffen beyond

repair. This feat left him exhausted and in a critically low condition.

His situation was none too good. Where was he to turn now for advice? The sympathy of doctors and nurses in the Hospital had been completely alienated by his breaking of the plaster setting. They regarded the action as a symptom of dementia. And he was just about demented with pain, resentment and despair. . . . Where was he to turn for help?

Providentially, Irene Vanbrugh came to the rescue. She dropped in to see him that afternoon, found Robert broken-down and heard the whole leg-story. It happened that one of her friends was Sir Alfred Fripp, the surgeon. She was convinced that Fripp could save the leg, if they only could bring him in to see Robert and surmount the barrier of medical etiquette existing at the hospital.

This barrier was finally overcome by saying that Fripp was Robert's life-long friend and former surgeon. Up he came and brought the Loraine temperature down by telling Robert he had done the right thing in breaking the plaster of Paris setting, and that he—Fripp—could save the leg. It didn't happen as quickly as that: schemings, consultations and X-ray photographs took close on a week. But Fripp saved the leg.

He set the tibia and the upper bone in such a way as to make a knee-joint, where other doctors had held that a joint could not be made. He treated the knee with massage and adjustable splints and a series of surgical aids that were seven years ahead of the time, and his very own. He told Robert that the knee would not be stiff, nor crooked, but lame for a very long time. It was; but the mending of it ultimately was as pretty a piece of work—admitted by Fripp—as ever the great surgeon had done. A wonderful friend to actors and soldiers was Fripp, and a particularly good one to Robert.

The end of September found the lame man recuperating at a convalescent hospital at Swanage, and Shaw making plans. G. B. S. writes from Parsnasilla, Ireland:

"How soon will you be able to play again if you decide to return to the boards instead of starting an Aeroplane

Express? You can work controls with a game leg, can't you? It's only shoving a stretcher.

"The reason I ask is that as *Pygmalion* came off at His Majesty's at the end of the season to big business, and Tree was discussing a resumption of it when he died; Mrs. Campbell is looking round for another go.

"Now, there is not the least reason why Higgins should not be lame, or Tanner lame, or any of the rest of my heroes. So long as you have a mouth left and one lung to keep it going, you will still be better than the next best: my pieces are not leg pieces.

"It is no joke, all the same; but quite seriously there is no reason why an actor should, like a Roman Catholic priest, be perfect in all his members to discharge his function. A manager might jib at it at first; but when one appearance had settled the question by the play going through exactly as usual (except for a little extra sympathy to begin with), it would never be thought of again."

But Robert had never felt drawn to *Pygmalion*, and had other plans in view. This letter arrived just as he had finished reading the only possible translation of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, one by Gladys Thomas and Mary F. Guillemard. Romance had fastened on him once more, a new light had dawned; and the role of the long-nosed Gascon hero fixed all immediate ambition for him.

He contracted with Charles B. Cochran to present *Cyrano de Bergerac*. And not only *Cyrano de Bergerac*, but nine revivals[1], in default of finding suitable new plays, to carry them over a period of three years.

During these three years, Robert was to be paid a yearly salary of £7,020 by Cochran, in weekly sums of £135, whether he was playing or not. When he was playing, he was to receive one-half of the weekly gross receipts above £1000, in addition to his minimum salary of £135: except in the case of a costume or spectacular play, when his share of half the receipts only started after £1,500.

He was to have four weeks' holiday a year; was only to play in the provinces for four weeks a year; the remainder of the time he was to be starring in plays in London theatres, which were to be mutually agreed. He was to be in sole control of the casting and production and to have the final voice in the selection of plays; in fact, he was to have everything an actor could desire, for he had a great-hearted showman in C. B. Cochran behind him.

Seldom in the history of the theatre can an actor have signed such an impossibly advantageous agreement. And this was at a time when other men about to demobilise were to run into terrible straits trying to secure employment. In the Cochran contract, Robert had beaten his *Superman* contract with Charles Frohman by obtaining a fixed yearly salary for three years; and by the clause that if he and Cochran could not agree on a new play, there was to be a revival of any one of Robert's former successes.

[1]The revivals agreed were: *The Admirable Crichton*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Taming of the Shrew*. In these he had not played, but wished to play. Other revivals were: *Henry V*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *the School for Scandal*, *Arms and the Man*, *Man and Superman*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, in all of which he had made his name; while as Young Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer* in October, 1909, he had "established his reputation as England's leading comedy actor," according to the Press.

Cochran, of course, bore all the loss liabilities and production expenses of the venture. Where and how he expected to recoup himself, when he was paying his star such a price, is a mystery. Even if the shows played to unbroken capacity—an impossibility—Robert's half-share of the gross receipts would eat away the takings once these exceeded the purely nominal figures of £1,500 and £1,000. Besides the figures of £1,500 for running a spectacular or costume play, and a £1,000 for running a modern or drawing-room comedy, were far below the mark. Also as a play's takings mount, so do its expenses, in the shape of author's royalties. Did C. B. Cochran expect Robert's war fame as the actor who had served his country so well to work some miracle on the balance sheets? For no mere artist could have made this proposition pay for the manager.

There was, of course, another factor: the artist in Cochran. He had been associated with Richard Mansfield in America, when that actor had toured the States with *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The play had made a fortune—for Mansfield. It appealed to Cochran. And, although in 1918 C. B. Cochran was known as London's Revue King—only fluff and revues had succeeded on the stage during the four War years—he longed to be behind a triumph on the legitimate stage with a legitimate actor, an actor who was known on both sides of the Atlantic. Such a man was Robert.

But it says a great deal for Cochran's enterprise that he set off on this production with his star on crutches. He was risking his own hard-earned capital. *Cyrano* entailed a minimum cast of 62 (many of these people doubled four parts), and a net bill of £5,067 for scenery, properties and costumes. This figure did not include the fee paid to Edmund Dulac, the artist, for designing, nor the expenses incidental to rehearsals—and the orchestra rehearsals ran away with a fortune.

Cochran had a shrewd foreknowledge of all this. Knew also that his crutchman with only one lung had to learn a part longer and more varied than Hamlet, had to fight a duel without a knee-cap, drop from a tree, climb, strut, vociferate

and *dominate* the stage continually. Did ever an impressario take such a chance?

Yet on the day they signed the contract—November 21, 1918—they parted from the solicitors with a great and common satisfaction. Each had what he wanted and looked forward to the coming weeks with delight.

It was a chill, fine day, and the dissolving damp threatened to settle on the knee and chest of the ex-soldier and give him trouble. But Cochran felt that his confidence was justified. His star had been working. His play version was complete; his cast, set out on paper, looked right. What Cochran did not know was that the Cyrano version had been finished by Robert discussing the play continually during the last three months with Smart—not through any medium, in spirit—and that Robert was fighting to regain his sanity. But Cochran was safe; his star was slowly coming through the shadows on this new part. Robert had found his outlet—his all-necessary escape from himself.

Cyrano had to be played by he-men. The actors for the principal parts were all away on different fronts: Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Egypt. Robert dived through the War Office records and sent wires. Then he started pulling wires of another kind. Home came Gerald Lawrence, Nicholas Hannen, Lewis Casson, Leslie Faber.

News spread that Loraine wished to cast his production among actors who had served with the Forces; and, just as Robert was despairing of casting *Cyrano* at all, for the effeminate youths who had dodged conscription were quite unsuitable for the parts, in poured applications from young men on battleships, on coastguard service, or with regiments, who now hoped to return to the stage.

Thus were recruited Harry Kendal, Reginald Purdell, Harold French (all of whom subsequently became leading juveniles), who played various cadets of Gascony at salaries varying from £4 10*s.* to £5 6*s.* 8*d.* *Cyrano* was a production that aimed at returning to the great traditions of the stage. They wished to be in it. For the same reason, Leslie Faber and Nicholas Hannen took salaries of £20 and £16.

But the gathering of this company took time; weeks elapsed.

Costumiers were the next stumbling-block in the post-war hiatus. The old men and women left on their staffs knew how to fix a chorus girl's spangles and tights, but trembled at the thought of assembling a Musketeer's jerkin and trews. They had not been trained in the 'historical.' The man at Nathan's who managed that department had become a rigger in the Air Force. What could be more fortunate? Investigations were set afoot, a word said in the right quarter, and the man was hauled back from a Squadron with the Army of Occupation on the Rhine.

By the middle of January, 1919, the *Cyrano* personnel was set and ready to launch into rehearsal. As Cochran, by now, was occupied with two or three revues, five or six boxing contests, the approaching Laurette Taylor-Hartley Manner's season and arrangements for the projected coming of the Guitrys, *Cyrano* was left very much to Robert. It was a huge undertaking for one man to get going, especially a man on crutches, who was suffering from being over-weight, in poor health and in pain.

Herbert Jarman came to his assistance.

'Ole Jarman,' as he was called, had often helped Lewis Waller in his productions, and was an authority on costume. He had sufficient means to refuse remuneration, and worked for pure love of the theatre.

Jarman, it was, who stood beside the volcanic Robert and quietened him after each eruption. Jarman's voice flowed soothingly, an antidote to lava-burn. He and Robert were a combination of opposites, to which the company re-acted like magic. Rostand's play took shape, moving mightily under them.

Dulac, the artist, would have been too sensitive to endure Robert's abrupt, commanding manner long. Jarman interposed. So it was that Dulac re-designed some of the scenes four times to compromise with Robert's views; yet managed to retain the vivid apartness of his own conception and so add a further note of richness to the play.

Jarman and Dulac worked out the costumes together—there were 200 of them, some with nine parts each—before the final sketches were shown to Robert for approval. In this way, Robert was saved much preliminary bother. A good thing; for he had his own recurring crises with carpenters and electricians, who were hard to get and only too ready to strike. Indeed, if he had not been able to side-track certain work to carpenters demobilising from the Air Force, the show would have been held up by endless delays.

The stage at rehearsal resembled nothing so much as an Army Base Camp. Only the ghostly shrouded stalls of the dim auditorium were typical of the theatre. On the boards men in Navy, Army and Air Force uniforms came smartly to attention when instructed by a figure at the side and saluted with a 'Yes, sir,' although the figure at the side was the only one in mufti! Robert, on crutches.

Horrifying it was to see him throw away his crutches and lurch and lunge about the stage when taking up his cue as Cyrano. Foolhardy, the company thought it of him to take such risks and impose such a strain on a non-existent knee, trying to give a performance at each rehearsal. They did not know that in this forgetting of himself as Cyrano, even to the denial of any physical disability, Robert was working out his regeneration.

It came to the point that as Cyrano he could walk: while as Loraine he could only move about on crutches. †But that is a well-known "magic" of the stage.†

His week-ends were spent at Brighton, Bournemouth, Eastbourne, and Torquay, not for health's sake alone—chiefly to prove his identity. In four weeks there had been seven cases at various seaside resorts of men obtaining money from residents and board from large hotels as Robert Loraine. One man was able to get away with £640.

Great was the astonishment at these hotels whenever Robert drove up in a closed Daimler limousine and showed himself to be a simple, large, fat man with spectacles, on crutches. By no means was he the swagger fellow with the

†Mr. Shaw has interpolated between†.

perky moustache and eyeglass of his 1916 War days, photographs of whom the poseurs had imitated! On these trips he was accompanied by his stage manager, who heard him on the way through Cyrano. It was Cyrano now with him all the time, to the exclusion of every other thought. And although at the beginning he had discussed the play with Smart, he now took heavier and heavier drinks at night so as to fall asleep, obtain rest, and prevent Smart from coming to him. He was no longer living in the past, or as any particle of the man of the past, but as Cyrano.

Evelyn Cochran (C. B. Cochran's wife) noticed the strength of his whisky at Edinburgh where the play opened on March 3rd, 1919, and suggested he take it in milk. C. B. Cochran was glad his star never kept alcohol in his dressing-room nor touched it till he came home from the last performance. Not that Robert was in the least affected by a bottle of whisky, or a bottle and a half. Drinks that would have sent other men under the table left his brain clear and speech cool. It was alarming how much whisky he could take, and remain unmoved. Alarming, even to people of the theatre. But, then, he was rather an alarming fellow altogether; and it was taken for granted that a man who had been right through the war and sustained heavy wounds, and still retained a Berserk vitality, should detonate like dynamite. It was expected of him; although everybody was forever trying to ward off a detonation, especially Jarman.

Jarman, Dulac, Frank Collins (Cochran's Chief of Staff), Cochran and Robert sat at supper after the play into five and six hours of every morning, altering and improving the production. They played Edinburgh, Newcastle and Glasgow before they opened in London. At Newcastle and Glasgow Robert all but lost his voice before the first performances, because he took the entire day over lighting and stage-setting rehearsals. Carpenters and electricians cost the show a weekly £160, which gives an idea of the size of the production; and, as the play had been boxed into five scenes and two acts, with only one interval between the Acts, the speed over scene-changing had to be terrific. It called for fine organisation.

Cyrano leapt into the breach to show them how to do it, bringing a Colonel-of-the-Army sense of dispatch with him.

Jarman, thoroughly alarmed by these titanic displays of energy and greatly fearing for Robert's health, at last persuaded Cyrano to leave the stage-setting and lighting to him for the London opening. Robert needed all the rest he could get for his body and voice. The huge false nose he wore as Cyrano blocked his breathing, immediately placing his heart under a strain, and making it difficult for him to enunciate. All the same, he nearly lost his voice for the First-night in London by taking an all-day orchestra rehearsal to within an hour of the curtain going up. But this was due to his own obstinacy and desire to have every effect perfect. Sufficient credit cannot be given to 'ole Jarman' for the way in which he tried to nurse Robert—or, rather, to nurse Cyrano—for the play, not the man, was Jarman's god.

There is a letter from him, two days before the London opening, which says:

"We have had a surgical day at the Garrick,[1] nothing irreparable. About you: If there is any sun or if it isn't raw, I should like to hear that you have had a hack-out. You haven't been in the open air for weeks; a different kind of physical fatigue would do you good; besides, a horse keeps one in the lyrical key.

"I want you to believe that no matter what worry your voice may have given you, you have never lost one iota through inflexibility; your compass has never shortened. Night after night I have waited in front in apprehensive discomfort to hear whether you would have to do your work on 5 or 6 notes, and always before you have got down from your stool in the first scene I have known I need not worry.

"Now, I wish that after the duel you would go at once to your pal. Casson[2] is a splendid figure, and by contact with him you can only derive dignity. The two of you together always make a poignant picture. I value the pictorial so much

[1]The stage at the Garrick Theatre where *Cyrano* was first played on March 28th, 1919, was very small, and several feet of scenery on the flats and built pieces had to be lopped off to make the scenes fit.

[2]Lewis Casson as Le Bret.

that at the end of Scene II, when you are standing with Christian, I would like you not to leave go of him, nor to turn, but to smack the Musketeer with the back of your hand. I believe it would look bigger and less ceremonious. To return to Casson, would it appeal to you . . . ?" And so on, into further details of performance which would only interest a student of the part.

The letter's soothing tone was typical of Jarman: so was the manner in which suggestions were put forward so as to build up life, in such a way that they could not fail to be taken. Such is the producer's art. And to that art much of *Cyrano's* sweeping success was no doubt due, although Jarman received but a line on the programme. That line gave him all the joy he needed, however, and *Cyrano* was his life's last work.

To say that critics were ecstatic about the play and production, would be to understate it. A. B. Walkley, most restrained and famous critic of the day, began by remarking that: "It sent a playhouseful of English people into ecstasies of enjoyment almost to intoxication. .

" *Cyrano* is audaciously, triumphantly, flamboyantly romantic in its magnificent swagger, in its sacrifice of everything in life to the rounded phrase and the *beau geste*, in its *sheer unbridled joy of living*. Romantic to the very tip of Cyrano's nose. And Mr. Loraine has produced it romantically, with beautifully romantic scenery and dresses, with an almost continual accompaniment of romantic music, and, *happiest stroke of all*, with fearlessly romantic acting. *His death is a thing of pure romantic beauty*. . . .

"When the play was over last night, the house gave Mr. Loraine a demonstration of delight—delight with his performance, delight at seeing the actor once more at his work—which fairly unnerved him, as well it might. He could only stammer out his thanks. Some of the stage crowd gathered behind him had already resumed their airmen's uniform. And that gave the last touch of romance to this romantic evening."

Pæans of praise arose from all sides, excepting from those

critics who qualified their appreciation by preferring Coquelin's[1] Cyrano to Loraine's. Coquelin's was more Gascon, they declared. Others preferred Loraine's to Coquelin's. That was one controversy. But the other and never-ending controversy was on the size of Cyrano's nose. Was it justified? "Such an infernal proboscis never disfigured human countenance," said some. "The audience are as shy of it as Cyrano; they can scarcely look at him." Anyway, said Robert, the tragedy is about a man who is handicapped in life and love by a big nose; if it doesn't disfigure him, why is he making a fuss about it? That was his point.

Sidney Carroll hit the nail on the head: "Although the pantomimic size of the nose deprives the actor of almost all facial expression, we never for a moment lose our insight into the man's soul," he said. "Such is the magic of fine words, finely spoken, of great thoughts eloquently expressed, that the nose disappears. And this bizarre mixture of all that is grotesque and all that is lovely, thrills us with the desire to enjoy our manhood, makes our pulses throb with a zest for life; *it points the road to unselfishness, it teaches us to despise the mean.*"

The last sentence expressed the play's true strength and spiritual message. Thousands echoed his sentiments.

"Cyrano has shown us how to live," was the main cry in hundreds of letters that poured in to Robert. "Our two sons have been taken from us, we have nothing to live for, nothing to hope for. Cyrano had nothing to live for, nothing to hope for, yet he never wavered," is one. Many were from women who had lost their husbands, one of whom the play had made weep for the first time. To those bereaved or torn by the horrors of war, it presented the nobility of anguish. To those

[1]When the current criticisms on Coquelin's Cyrano in 1898 were turned up, they revealed that most of the critics had railed against Coquelin for not being sufficiently Gascon.

"Candidly we cannot say he is the ideal Cyrano," said they. "He is not enough of the swashbuckler—of the Gascon. At times he seems to forget he has a sword at his side. He under-acts the scene of the poetic duel, when Cyrano composes a duel as he fights and pinks his adversary with the last line." . . .

Evidently that scene had always been very hard to ' put across.' Robert's duelling sword was so heavy, that his vis-à-vis—by no means a wounded man—could scarcely lift his which matched it; Robert's theory being that Cyrano would naturally carry a great sword.

who were crippled or disfigured it presented the triumph of a great soul. Truly the play had been produced at the right time. The hearts of the audience were wrung, they dissolved into tears; but they departed comforted.

At least one out of every five must have written to Robert; for rarely were less than fifty or sixty letters received in a day. Most of them began, "Dear Cyrano," and were anonymous. Soon these letters stated: "I have come for the sixth time"; and then the sixth- and seventh-timers began to take a proprietary interest in the play. Their letters would even change to "Dear Sir . . . the collar worn by one of the Cadets on Gascony in the 4th scene to-day was spotlessly white. How could it be white when he had been right through the campaign? It has never been white before." Eighteen letters on that one point—all signed—came after that one performance. The slightest change of business in the acting was deeply resented; any mistake in lighting immediately reported. These old-timers would not have "their most moving memory" spoiled.

Their memory for words was astonishing. The published book of the play was placed on sale in the theatre lobbies. After this the fan mail increased by some twenty letters a day; and the burden of these letters was always the same, beginning either "Dear Cyrano . . . or Dearly-loved Friend," and continuing: "We have searched through our copy of the play and find that the words on 'panache' are omitted. I—or we—came to see the play again yesterday afternoon, and nearly cried out when you spoke the words in the second scene to the Comte de Guiche. We turned the place up in our book in the interval, but the sentence is not there. . . . Will you please . . . ?" and so on. They all wanted the words:

"*Panache is the spirit of bravery; the wit of courage; the humour of heroism; the halo of the happy warrior.*"

They were Loraine's own interpretation of 'panache,' which is untranslatable.

Of course it was his voice and personality that imbued the audience's memory, and made words unforgettable. Disguised as his face might be by the nose, masked as his voice might

have become, there was still an essence and *timbre* that was his own. Few who heard the words could ever forget the triple heartbreak in

"Climb, you sluggard, climb.
Climb . . . climb . . . climb."

when Cyrano bade Christian climb to Roxane's balcony and take the kiss which his—Cyrano's—words had won for him. And then as Christian climbs:

"Aie, strange pain that wrings my heart!
The kiss, love's feast, so near! I, Lazarus,
Lie at the gate in darkness. Yet, to me
Falls still a crumb from the rich man's board—
'Tis my heart receives thee, Roxane, mine!
For on the lips you press, you kiss as well
The words I spoke just now. My words—my words."

Again, in the death scene:

"I cry you pardon, but I may not stay;
See, the moon-ray that comes to call me hence!
. . . . . .
You strip from me the laurel and the rose!
Take all! Despite you, there is yet one thing
I hold against you all—and when to-night
I enter Christ's fair courts and, lowly-bowed,
Sweep with doffed casque the heavens' threshold
blue—(*a tenor note*)
One thing is left, that void of stain or smurch
I bear away despite you—my PANACHE."

But no mere re-printing of the words would re-produce the tone, or the vision, faith and texture of the soul that lit and lifted them beyond—words.

Applause never jarred the fall of the curtain. The house was too deeply moved. The audience would sit in the dark without stirring, snuffling a little for a full two minutes

Foulsham & Banfield.

Composing a letter to Roxane for Christian

Cyrano de Bergerac, Drury Lane, 1919.

without a word. Then the curtain would go up for Roxane, Ragueneau and Le Bret to take a call. As it came down, the shouts would ring out for 'Cyrano!' And the house would not disperse before he had appeared. This usually meant a call first for the nuns, with Haidee Wright, the Mother Superior, among them; for Christian and De Guiche; and for the Cadets of Gascony. And these calls would be repeated until at the end of five minutes Robert came, in his dressing-gown, without a nose—for Cyrano was dead—walking with a stick.

His name was mentioned with Barry Sullivan, Toole, and Irving. Lena Ashwell, who had acted with Irving, wrote to the *Times*, saying that Loraine's Cyrano was the noblest performance the theatre had seen since Irving died.

Willie Maugham (W. Somerset Maugham), that reserved man among authors, whose extreme sensitiveness is hidden by a cold exterior, came to a matinée, and wrote him: "There is certainly no one else now who could act that very difficult part half so well, and I am delighted to see that the papers have recognised your great merits. It did my heart good to hear your reception at the end of the play."

Sir John Hare, long retired, last of the older generation of actor-managers, who had not seen the play, sent him a formal note: "Dear Colonel Loraine,—The best news for many months is that which records your great and brilliant success in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. I heartily congratulate you and *the stage* for the bright gleam of light which illumines its darkness." Many actors who had never penned a line to brother artists, wrote the same[1]. The feeling was that Loraine had brought dignity back to the stage. Cyrano was regarded as the Renaissance.

[1]Of course there were letters from personal friends of his in the theatre, 'Bobbie' was always greatly friended—as from Cissie Loftus, who said: "In the whole of my stage experience, two memories stand out. Two moments of the most exquisite moving beauty. One was hearing Forbes-Robertson as Hamlet speaking the line —'Rest. Rest—perturbed spirit.' And the other hearing you as Cyrano saying: 'No, my sweet love, I never loved you.' All the anguish, all the heartache in the world was in your voice, and it was almost more than I could bear."

Then there were intimate hurried pencilled notes on scraps of paper sent round to him during performances, as: "A thousand congratulations on your excellent recovery. Your 1st Night Sister at Lillers, 1914."

Shaw dropped in to the theatre one afternoon, unheralded, on his own, and let Robert have his opinion, on April 19th:

"I shall get into trouble with Charlotte for having gone to *Cyrano* without her," he says, "but I was in town on an emergency on Tuesday, and could not resist the opportunity of looking in. It is enchanting, and has the quite special quality that belongs to you in an extraordinary degree; but you should have taken Covent Garden to make it pay.

"It shows up Coquelin's Cyrano as a *tour de force* of method and execution rather than a moving embodiment of a dramatic poem. I enjoyed Coquelin with a connoisseur's enjoyment of his technique; but I was really moved by your playing, and delighted to find that the artist had killed the colonel and not the colonel the artist.

"I had great misgivings about the play when I heard you were going to attempt it, because the difficulties of translation seemed to me to be insuperable. But the untranslatable bits (the ballades) don't matter as much as I thought; there is enough common human stuff in the play to make it independent of language.

"I gather from the behaviour at the box office that business is immense. They threw me a stall as they would throw a bone to a dog.

"Tell Ada King that tryst rhymes to Christ, and not to whist.

"Have you a revolving stage that you work your changes so quickly?

"At the end you must be careful of a very effective comic —— No—that is one of your gifts. You exploded it once (inadvertently, I think) in the very moving passage in the death scene where you deny that you loved Roxane.

"Also, I don't think Cyrano should fall. The whole point of the death is that he dies on his feet; and he ought to stiffen there and be visibly a standing dead man. To make this clear, Roxane, not realising he is dead, should go to his assistance; and then the statue should fall, and fall stiff. To save your bones, one of the men, seeing what is happening, should catch him as he is falling away from her, and the two should

let him down, still stiff as a poker at full length. Just try it in one or two ways. As it is, it is too obviously a stage fall; and the effect of the scene is so very fine that it is a pity to mar it by the slightest touch of artificiality.—Ever,

"G. B. S."

Cyrano's death was altered accordingly; and four days later, when Robert had evidently consulted Shaw about his own misgivings, for Robert never ceased working at a play even when he had it running, G. B. S. writes:

"As to the Arras scene, I don't see how the effect of a toy battle, which undoubtedly exists, can be avoided. It is in the play, and perhaps provides the only atmosphere in which the arrival of Roxane could have any sort of plausibility. Whether a sentry and a change of guard somewhere in the course of the act, or some sort of fatigue going on, would heighten the illusion to any extent worth the trouble, I can't estimate. There is no feeling that Cyrano is not doing his bit; but the cadets certainly do impress the spectators as the most shameless slackers known to history. The situation is saved by one's conviction that Gerald[1] in his magnificent corslet must be at least Wallenstein, and that the soil HE guards alone escapes the earthquake.

"As to the ballade of the cadets, it is so obviously hopeless that it really does no harm. It is pure ritual; and by some divine instinct you have hit on that way of delivering it. The audience takes its hat off and bows its head reverently, murmuring responses—and all is well.

"*That feeling that you are the mere remnant of a man is inevitable.* You probably did not notice during the war something that you would have noticed very painfully if you had not been so intensely pre-occupied. You turned forty. Since *I* turned forty, I have turned fifty and sixty; and they are both jokes compared to turning forty. Forty is the change from the young man to one no longer young. It makes a much greater impression than any other change short of 70, as to which I cannot quite speak yet. But look at the work the best men

[1]Gerald Lawrence as the Maréchal Comte de Guiche in armour.

go between 40 and 66 (don't ask me to say 60[1])! As to getting some conscience about making people do things, and seeing that it is really no use fundamentally unless they really want to do them, that is a development, not a disablement.

"At the same time you must not expect to be able to play so heavy a part eight times a week and feel first-rate all the time. Salvini would not play more than four times a week when he first came over to these islands. Barry Sullivan, a man of magnificent physique, played parts like Don Felix and Charles Surface to rest himself twice a week: when he tried to play Richard every night at Drury Lane he became fearfully fagged and began to break up. Robertson's (Forbes-Robertson) long run of *Hamlet* told very perceptibly on him at the end; he lost all his gaiety. *Cyrano* is so hideously expensive that I suppose it is necessary to exploit it to the utmost; but you will have to spare yourself very scientifically when you are on, and nurse yourself a bit when you are off, if you are to get through without hurting yourself.

"We shall not be back in town until Wednesday, April 30th; and in the meantime we have to spend Saturday with Wells to see his infants playing *The Taming of the Shrew* down in Essex. Will you come to Adelphi on Thursday, May 1st, to lunch at 1.30? Friday is also available, if you give Charlotte prompt notice."

. . . . . .

So much for incense. The hard financial facts of the case were that *Cyrano* was filling the Garrick Theatre to capacity, and yet not clearing expenses.

This, of course, was mainly due to the star taking half the receipts over £1,500. Expenses ranged somewhere round £2000, and to clear this figure it was necessary to take £2,800. Here is the arithmetic:

£2,800 — £1,500 = £1,300 ÷ 2 = Robert £650 and Cochran £650. Of Cochran's £650, five hundred had to go to make up the £2,000 expenses, and the remaining £150 was completely swallowed by additional royalties.

Now the Garrick barely held £2,200, cram-jam. So that

[1]Shaw was then 63.

Cochran, with one of the finest successes in London, was playing to a weekly loss of £2 to £300, according to what he paid out in royalties.

This was bad business, especially as *Cyrano*, before opening in London, had registered a production cost of over £8,000.

Cochran called for a 20% cut in salaries (to reduce the £200 to £300 weekly loss). The actors complied. But Robert would not have this. He deferred his share of the gross until after the figure of £2,900 had been taken—thereby sacrificing a possible £700, and giving Cochran the benefit of a possible £1,400. As the Garrick could not take £2,900, the production moved to Drury Lane, which held a capacity of £4,000.

Fortunately the press again reviewed the play on this move with a chorus of praise. The risk of transferring a show in the West End is known; a move discourages patrons. But the production was seen to far greater advantage on the bigger stage, and receipts began to build round £3000, when Sir Thomas Beecham exercised an option he had on Drury Lane to take it for Opera. This meant that at the end of three weeks *Cyrano* would have to move; no clear run ahead was possible.

By this time Cochran was frankly terrified. He disliked the prospect of another move. He did not believe the success would stand it. Cyrano seemed to him to present nothing but a liability. The problems that had been gathering ever since the first week of the run came to a head. If *Cyrano* was not to be played—what, then? demanded Loraine. Cochran and he could not agree on a *new* play. By the terms of his contract Loraine was demanding to revive *Henry V*. This meant another gigantic production, one that was certain to ensure artistic success, and further to heighten Cochran's reputation. But Cochran wanted no more artistic successes at that price, with a star who was overpowering.

On his side, Robert felt that he had sacrificed a sum approximating £2,000 (his share of Drury Lane receipts had he continued to take them weekly over £1,500). He had also fulfilled his side of the contract by bringing a success. Yet all he had been met with were pleas for concessions on the

contract. He had granted those pleas. Now there were further pleas—and he wanted to go on playing Cyrano, and Cochran did not want to go on with *Cyrano*.

It was a pity that discussions always took place back-stage in Robert's dressing-room after the play. Sometimes they took place between afternoon and evening performances. Anyway, it was always when he had just concluded playing a part longer than Hamlet, and when he was not wholly in himself, but feeling very Cyranoesque—Gascon, poetic, defiant.

"Oh, well," said he to Cochran on one of these occasions, "if you don't feel like carrying out your side of the bargain, I'm tired of arguments. A man either keeps his word or he doesn't. I'll tear up the contract."

Tear it up he did, there and then.

Cochran was staggered, but his shock presently gave way to relief. He pinned up a notice to say the play's run would terminate on May 31st.

Robert began to think. He had thrown away £7,020 a year, all for a gesture. What bad business! He also now perceived that if he had had a success, it was Cochran who had enabled him to have it. Cochran had lost money and been the true *Cyrano* of the venture.

Oddly enough they were still friends. So Robert went round and spent the following Sunday with Cockie, and suggested the contract should be on again. But Cockie was feeling shy, and preferred to sell Robert the production—scenery and clothes for £2,000—to be paid for in weekly sums of £100, should Robert continue running the play.

It was unthinkable that *Cyrano* should cease. Business friends straightway came forward with offers to guarantee any loss that might occur in the play's continued run. Robert acquired an extension of the lease at Drury Lane, Opera was postponed, and *Cyrano* proceeded triumphantly under his own management.

Hectic days followed. Robert was actor, producer and business manager in one. A fellow Welshman, dreamer and firebrand—Sir Ellis Griffiths, M.P., a friend from his airman days in Anglesey—had stories to tell of how he would come

and sit in Loraine's dressing-room after matinées in the hope of taking him out to tea. He would find 'Bobbie' scribbling away, signing his name down three-decker tiers of cheques.

"The accountant and the stage-manager would be on either side of him," said Ellis, "and there he would be scraping away, with a pot of black tea going blacker before him, and a great chop growing more and more tired next to the tea, and six boiled eggs—alternatives to the chop—all hard and all cold, standing by like ninepins. And he would be smoking, in spite of the trouble with his lung, till the air in his tiny room became such as no ordinary man with two lungs could breathe. And the place was so dark all round, you could scarcely see, as the only bright light was focussed on his cheques."

Presently the Half-hour call would go, and Loraine would turn and make-up and go back to the stage, without having eaten anything. But he enjoyed the struggle: it was life to him. Enjoyed it the more crowded it grew, except when he had to go on stage with a mind that was working out percentages behind his speeches, so as to give an answer to some business arrangement during the interval. Such occasions were rare, luckily, for they would have dealt death to the acting. *Cyrano* showed a never-failing weekly profit. Even the expenses of two more moves, one to the Duke of York's and one to the Savoy, were taken in the play's stride, together with the heavy advertising necessary to cover them. The production was paid off. 'Bob' revelled in the sense of urgent living that the moves gave him, in the satisfaction of difficulties overcome, and in the momentum. Once within the wings he steeped himself in Cyrano—released his romantic self into a wider romantic self—back stage he was still the Colonel, called so by his company, although most of them had now changed into mufti.

A figure asked one day to see *Mr.* Loraine. "*Colonel* Loraine," rebuked the secretary. "What is your name?" "Say Corporal du Maurier would like to speak to him," retorted Gerald briskly.

Life was good again—full of swing. After ten months of this comparatively 'new' life and prodigious labour, Robert found he was fitter than when he had started, a different man.

Cyrano alone could not have worked the regeneration had he not secured a roof-flat at the top corner of St. James' Street. This flat had a round sitting-room with five windows from which he could see across South London to the Croydon Hills. It was a sun-trap overlooking space. How he loved space! At night, when he slept, he had good air. That helped to restore him.

He hung gold cages with canaries in the windows, so that the birds' twittering should keep out dark presences when he was alone. Dark presences were still apt to come. But he was seldom alone. Boys of the R.F.C., either on leave or demobilising, would come and sit with him at night, or sit on his bed in the morning and talk over their problems with him while he shaved. Living shapes were best. He obtained employment for so many of them, men and officers. His rooms were a meeting-ground for the R.F.C., also for authors (he was looking for plays to follow *Cyrano*) and time and again the walls would echo to parties with the Guitrys and the Hartley-Manners; and once to Yvonne Printemps singing *Butterfly* to Puccini. Robert had brought Puccini to hear her at her request. But Puccini would never give an opinion on any one in *Butterfly*, since he had been spoiled by Emmy Destinn.

Life was good indeed; not the same, but good in its difference. He withdrew *Cyrano* late in October, when it was still playing to big business, because he was faced with a fifth move to a yet smaller theatre where the rent demanded was £600.

His indignation could not stomach the idea of such a rent. Pre-war rents had been around £200[1]. Besides, it was unlikely that *Cyrano* would withstand the shock of a fifth move. The play's shiftings had been without parallel in theatrical history, and the production would certainly never have survived had

[1]The greater part of the celebrated two-year run of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was played to receipts of £800 a week, on which Sir George (then Mr.) Alexander could make a profit, because the rent of the St. James' Theatre was then £150 a week.

they not taken place in a period of boom. Everybody went to shows: the post-war jubilation had started. And every one wanted to dabble in shows. The theatre was no longer sacred ground; there were more plays than playhouses, hence the soaring rentals. Leisurely pre-war days of actor-managers had been stampeded out of existence by scrambling commercial managements. Crazy speculation had taken the place of endeavour. Times had changed.

The only jar Robert experienced was in the matter of rentals. *Cyrano* was off, but he was besieged with offers. What next? He could not find a new play. So he leaned back to breathe and set his papers in order . . . a grand to-do, as, owing to the intervention of the War, he had to clear a host of pre-war commitments. His ward had betaken herself to Canada, and was no longer a drain on his resources. He sent a cheque to Shaw, repaying money lent him during the war, as well as one for outstanding royalties on an arrangement for the *Man and Superman* tour in Canada, seven years before. To the latter, Shaw replied:

"The £600 or whatever it is is all nonsense. The play did not make the money. Now, if your acting had lost it, and I could contend that the money was there for you to make had you been equal to the occasion, I should claim it remorselessly. But the facts as compared with runs elsewhere prove that your acting made more money than the play, and of this surplus I had a very substantial whack.

"There is consequently no real human reason why I should exploit you and Rostand (or another) for money that the wretched *Superman* never earned. The Statute of Limitations which has already written off the item legally is for once right as well as convenient."

This says a great deal for Shaw's affection for him at the time, as Shaw is usually adamant on the question of royalties. The letter continues:

"It is too soon to revive *Superman* as a regular production. A revival would be taken as a flag of distress. You must make Tanner a repertory part like Irving's Matthias in the Bells; that is all there is now left in him.

"Have you considered the fact that Shakespeare was *made* by the enormous success of *Henry VI*? The public liked the fights and the rapid tragic episodes so much that they stood three plays of it. I have always believed this success could be repeated. You could make a *novel* sensation with it and then follow up with *Richard III.*

"The ideal thing would be to get the three plays on and play the set twice a week. People would have to see the three if they saw one. As the casts are the same people, it would not mean three casts. There would be a tidy bill for armour and silken heraldic coats; but armour pays its way if the play bites.

"Then *Richard* is the grand climax. Somehow I do not believe in *Richard* until the ground has been prepared for him by a revival of interest in 'histories.' *Then* he would go like mad.

"I am very doubtful about *Henry V.* People are sick of jingoism and fed-up with Agincourt speeches."

Robert did not play *Henry V.* He took an engagement to revive *Arms and the Man* for the Christmas Season at the Duke of York's Theatre at a salary of £350 a week. He, of course, engineered this revival. Managerial circles were somewhat doubtful as to how the public would receive any play by Shaw in view of what was still considered to have been the author's flagrantly unpatriotic attitude during the War.

But the world's view had come round to Shaw's after the War. The public received the play with delight. Robert made another personal success. He had Stella Mervyn-Campbell and Gerald Lawrence with him from the Cyrano production. Below is Shaw's opinion, which is doubly interesting, remembering the letter from him that has just been quoted:

"*Ayot St. Lawrence,*
14th December, 1919.

"I went to the matinée yesterday and was horrified to find that the experience of 1894 was repeating itself. On that occasion there was a wildly successful first night, on which the company was anxiously doing its best with the play, and

wondering what would happen. What happened was that they were overwhelmed with laughter and applause. This set their minds completely at ease; and at the subsequent performances they played for the laughs and didn't get them. This was the beginning of that detestable effect as of all the characters being so many Shaws spouting Shavianisms, and provoking first a lot of shallow but willing laughter, and then producing disappointment and irritation. That seemed to me to be exactly what was happening yesterday. I did not enjoy myself a bit; and the audience, which came anticipating a great treat, cooled down all through, and ended by being annoyed and rather cross. Somebody hissed vigorously; and I felt extremely obliged to him. If it had not been for Morand[1], who stuck to his part all through, and showed no consciousness of the audience or of his points, I believe the whole audience would have hooted unanimously. Lawrence[2] also acted conscientiously and held the thing together; but he was too mild (I am sending him a line about it) and was a little bothered by Louka, who made orator's gestures like himself, and dug him in the ribs twice in a way horribly out of character. Whitby[3] was all right, because he managed to keep up the dramatic illusion, though he was really fudging his way through the part.

"The rest wasn't silence; I wish it had been. No doubt the audience thought your performance fine; but it was quite infamous. You were simply collecting laughs, asking for them, waiting for them, and not pretending to do anything else except once or twice, when you forgot yourself and acted instinctively. The audience was just longing to be allowed to believe in the play, and you wouldn't let it. For a moment, in the water-pipe scene, you looked as if you were going to be slightly drowsy; but after Raina's exit your arch wide-awakeness would have roused the Sleeping Beauty. There was not the faintest indication of fatigue or somnolence: at most you seemed without any reason to have become skittishly

[1]Playing Petkoff.

[2]Gerald Lawrence played Sergius.

[3]Arthur Whitby playing Nicola.

drunk. The scenes with Raina in this act were breezy beyond description. You worked that attitude with one foot on the dais to death; and the harder you worked it the breezier you became. There was nothing to appeal to the woman or the sympathy of the audience. You were playing her off the stage, a thing no woman likes; and you were defying them to take you seriously.

"The third act was not so bad, because it couldn't be. But it was desperately wanting in variety. You were visibly scoring the whole time; and the end of that inevitably is that the score loses its value. You sometimes remind me of a Dublin actor who played Richard III and refused to be beaten by Richmond in the fight. You will not admit that Bluntschli can ever be naïve or peppery or anything but victorious, just as you would never admit the tragic defeat of Tanner in *Man and Superman.* You are sometimes like Grummer in Pickwick: when a laugh is approaching you have the smile of a favourite; that is how you got the laugh for the machine-gun before you mentioned it. Unluckily, nature has endowed you with a certain irreducible minimum of good acting which saves you from the worst extremities of disaster, and gets praise for you when you are disgracing yourself with every conceivable histrionic profligacy; but you cannot take me in; and, what is more important to both of us just now, you cannot make a success of *Arms and the Man* by such games.

"These horrors did not happen when we rehearsed the play in the dead silence which ought to reign in a theatre from the rise of the curtain to its fall. There was illusion, then, even when there was no scenery and no costume. *Cyrano* was listened to in silence. It would not have had a dog's chance if you had had to stop after every line to let the mob hee-haw. The only way to compel the audience to take matters into their own hands is to ignore the laughs and go steadily through them, actually trying to make the audience lose as much as possible of the play through their own noisiness. Remember that the lines one does not hear are always imagined to be the best in the play. And though the words may be lost, the play can at least be seen without any interruption or disillusion.

When Raina is seen to open her mouth to speak, and then shut it again and wait quite obviously until the audience has finished butting into Bulgaria, there is an end of the play.

"A very skilful old hand can sometimes keep up enough action through a laugh (Morand does this) to save the situation; but that is quite beyond Stella at present; and *you* don't even want to do it, God forgive you.

"There were no laughs in Cyrano; and what people miss in Bluntschli is Cyrano's nose. They want the pathos, the defeat that underlay Cyrano from beginning to end. Now, Bluntschli is not a tragic figure and is not defeated; but it does not follow that Loraine as Bluntschli cannot make the same appeal as Loraine as Cyrano. The laughs are not drawing money; they are keeping it out of the house.

"*I* should give orders that the audience was to be absolutely ignored and that the company must play deftly and blindly in the play and for the play, no matter whether they were heard or not. But you like the audience to join in the representation. The result will be a failure. In spite of the first night notices, the public will soon find that the play is an irritating Shavian bore, with no characters in it and no emotion; and they will stay away. Your eight weeks will become six. Never mind; I shall be blamed."

The fact is that, however played, *Arms and the Man* could never make the same impression on an audience as *Cyrano*. Nor could Loraine as Bluntschli make the same appeal as Loraine as Cyrano; the part hasn't the dimensions, and it is anti-romantic. And, although Shaw was obviously hungering for emotional effects, *Arms and the Man* is a brilliant piece of virtuoso which pokes fun at emotion. If Robert had only played old Captain Shotover in *Heartbreak House*, he might have sounded a new organ note to satisfy himself and Shaw. But alas! the victorious ' Bob ' could only see himself in young man roles; and in any case his syndicate would have refused to touch *Heartbreak House*, as they wished to present Loraine in one of his former successes.

Then came a truly startling letter from Shaw a month later, after another visit to a matinée. (Let no one uninitiated

in the ways of the theatre imagine that Shaw and Robert were bad friends by now; Shaw still wanted Robert to revive *Pygmalion.*) Said the letter:

"Forgive me, but I want to rouse your attention rather violently. My visit to the play was quite unpremeditated. If I were a vain author I should have concluded that you were intoxicated with my comedy. And if I thought you had merely been dining, I should not have dreamt of alluding to it. But there was something in your brilliancy that alarmed me. Twenty years ago it would have been natural; and you would not have miscalculated a single stroke. But it was not quite natural; it was just a little miraculous; and once or twice you put the pitch up a shade higher than you meant to.

"Now, here is what I want to know, straight between the eyes. *Was it morphia?* I know you keep up appearances extraordinarily well, but I also know that if a man gets canaries to sing in his flat . . . and has nobody but members of his own profession to talk to (I avoid literary people like the plague), he is lonely; and if he has had his knee shot to pieces he cannot get about without hurting himself more or less. If, in addition, two battle-wounds have taught him the virtues of morphia, then, if I see him in a condition of superhuman brilliance, can you blame me if I wish my eyes were sharp enough to see whether his pupils are quite normal?

"There, now the murder is out. If I am making a fool of myself, so much the better. But I thought I'd risk it. You see, if it were so, nobody else would tell you because it would be an offensive thing to mention, and no business of theirs anyhow. Besides, they think that every one who touches morphia for a minute is a morphinomaniac.

"I once saw Duse play Magda under the influence of a dose of morphia after seeing her play it quite naturally a few nights before. It gave the same brilliant effect; but it was not quite right, and the effect on the audience was nothing like as great.

"By the way, what is so very exasperating about me in spite of my amiable qualities, is not that I am an egotistical and ridiculous author. Consider it a moment, and you will admit that an author's vanity would make you laugh quite

good-humouredly. What infuriates people is my incorrigible habit of constituting myself, uninvited, their solicitor, their doctor, and their spiritual director without the smallest delicacy. I have no right whatever to concern myself with your personal habits or your private welfare; but you see I do. I treat every one sympathetically as an invalid, injudicious in diet, politically foolish, probably intemperate, more or less mendacious and dishonest; and, however friendly my disposition and cheerful my way of putting it, they don't like it. I can't help it. After all, you cannot reasonably expect a playwright to mind his own business. Other people are his business. And his infernal meddlesomeness is sometimes useful. So be as charitable as you can.

"*Now* somebody wants you to revive *You Never Can Tell.*

Ever,

"G.B.S."

This time relations really were impaired. Robert resented Shaw's suspicions and told him so in language that was unnecessarily rude. Shaw had been most friendly in his letter; Robert, in his reply, was indignantly high-handed, an attitude which only intensified Shaw's suspicions.

†But as he had deliberately risked Robert's explosion and expected it (knowing his man), he did not resent it, and the irritation was soon forgotten. But there was a rift, not an unfriendly one, but a breach which proved permanent.

The revival of *Arms and the Man*, brilliant as it was, had been crushed under the combined weight of the enormous theatre rent and Robert's grandiose salary. It had to be withdrawn after a few weeks; and Shaw was pretty hard hit by its collapse. Always shrewd as a man of business and ruthless at looking facts in the face, Shaw saw that his plays could never stand such figures. He wrote off Robert professionally as a luxury beyond his means; and they never collaborated again as actor and author. Neither of them foresaw or intended this; but it turned out so and was inevitable under their circumstances.†

†Mr. Shaw has interpolated between†.

As to the morphia, there is this to be said on Robert's side. It is highly unlikely that he was playing under the influence of this drug, as morphia, when it was prescribed by doctors, always produced in him an uncomfortable feeling of distention. It is far more probable that he was giving an extra special performance, and doing what he called 'lifting the play.' The trouble was that he went beyond himself in these 'liftings,' and very often negatived the effects he wished to produce. He always approached every performance of a character he enjoyed playing, as though he were playing it for the first time, and was there to outdo himself. After frequent repetitions, this high-vaulting at a part was sure to lead to a certain artificiality, too high a lustre, an over-emphasis. Needless to say, he did not revive *You Never Can Tell*, he went off in February to San Moritz for a holiday.

His knee was worse, his nightcaps stronger, it was time to put his health in order. It was time, too, that he considered where he was to get the finance for *Henry V.*, a production he was always announcing.

San Moritz brought back some of his old bounce and vitality. He felt as though he could hit the ceiling. He paddled off on to the snow with his stick, and was taken for gentle tobogganings. But no sooner had he arrived than there came a letter from Sir James Barrie, asking him to return and play Stephen in *Mary Rose*, which was due to open shortly at the Haymarket. Robert declined on the grounds that he was in Switzerland for his health and busy planning his own productions. Whereupon Barrie sent a telegram, saying that if Robert would only consent to play on the first night of *Mary Rose*—for which he could make his own terms—Barrie was certain the play's success would be assured.

For some reason, Barrie was very apprehensive about the production of *Mary Rose*. Perhaps it was because Gerald du Maurier, who had, as it were, the first refusal of all his plays, did not wish to play in it. Gerald could not see himself as the soldier. He certainly thought the audience might laugh when the ghost of Mary Rose sat on her son's knee.

Robert, on the contrary, who had also read the script, pro-

nounced the play sure-fire. But it was a woman's play and not what he was seeking. He was, however, so touched by Barrie's wire, that in reply he chartered an aeroplane and set off to fly back to Barrie over the Alps, a route which had previously never been attempted.

Naturally he lost himself in the clouds and made a forced landing in Bavaria. He was never a very good navigator[1] and it was only to be expected. In Bavaria he was interned for five hours. Daylight had gone by the time he was released, and he was obliged to wait till the next morning before resuming his flight. Meanwhile, the little German town where he had been interned never despatched any of his wires, for the Burgomaster was still convinced he was a spy. So, away in London, after reporting his departure, the papers made of his non-arrival a first-class scare.

His disappearance occupied first one column on the main page of the morning papers and then five columns on the front pages of the noon-day and evening papers, and so on next day. Sir Hall Caine sent a long description from San Moritz of his departure on a snow-bird, exactly as if an aeroplane had never been seen before and the ascent had been made by Jules Verne. Aviators were out searching for him. Friends organised parties to comb the cols and crevasses. His life story was published.

There was two days' time for all this, because the petrol the Germans had given him in Bavaria was so bad he had a forced landing in Holland, in a most out of the way spot. Eventually he came to the Hook by canal and road and proceeded by night-boat to England, arriving in London at 10 a.m. the next morning, dog-tired. Sleepily, he drove straight to the Haymarket; saw something odd on a placard but never connected it with himself. And sleepily he rolled into rehearsal, by way of the stage during the first ghost scene. The company had the shock of their lives, they were attuned to the super-natural, and believed Bob Loraine was visiting them. Even Barrie was shaken.

[1]To-day that part of the world is aerially navigated almost entirely by the help of wireless.

So it was that everything Robert did became sensationalised, whether he wished it or not.

Mary Rose was an unqualified success. But it was Fay Compton's success and deservedly, for no one could have been lovelier in the part. Robert's cry, when Mary Rose disappeared on the island, and Stephen called: "Mary Rose—Mary Rose—Mary Rose," at the end of the Third Act, was recorded by some critics as the high-spot of the play. It was his tone, and the increasing anguish of that tone. Then he also had a certain masterful gentleness, which made Stephen, the father and husband, most lovable; but, in real truth, it didn't matter what he did or did not do, the play belonged to Mary Rose.

And, instead of resting up in an easy part, or rather in three easy parts, for he was in turn the young man, the father and the son, Robert grew restless. Grew restless, although it was always he who received a hand at every performance, directly he appeared on the stage. As Shaw had often pointed out, he liked to carry the whole show himself.

Moreover, his lameness was worse. The knee never let him alone. Critics had remarked on his ungainly stride across stage, quite forgetful that off-stage the man could only walk with the aid of a heavy stick. Robert was tired. He wanted to get away.

Vedrenne, his old friend, under whose management he had played the Shaw plays in 1907, told him he was burning his boats. It was always a foolish business to walk out of a success: another man would take over his part and be voted as good as he; whereas, if Robert only chose to play on quietly, he might conclude an arrangement with the Haymarket management at the end of *Mary Rose*, by which he could make that theatre his permanent home. Robert thought he could always conclude an arrangement with some theatre and make it his permanent home. He had, it is true, antagonised several commercial managers by calling them sewer-rats and such names; but the Haymarket management were of the older theatre aristocracy, like himself. He and they would easily come to terms. Vedrenne reiterated that to absent himself now, when important financial backing and managements were stabilising

out of boom and chaos was sheer folly. Bob would certainly find himself on his return without a home.

Bob listened, but did not listen. What use were arguments when the old devil was upon him: the desire for something new. He had to experience something fresh, see things he had not seen, be swept out of himself. So, the Haymarket Theatre looked for another Stephen, while Robert sailed across the Atlantic in September 1921, on a trip round the world.

PART FOUR

Marriage

CHAPTER XV

FATE AND his reputation decreed he was to make this world-trip like an Emperor. Better, for his time was his own: his every pleasure was consulted; his every wish observed; and he had no obligations to fulfil beyond being simply himself. This seemed to work wonders. Even the homage he had been shown when he toured America as the triumphant John Tanner with *Man and Superman*, was as nothing compared to the deference he was accorded on this world-trip, when he gathered all the rich fruits of a matured career.

In New York, where he spent two weeks, he met Jesse Lasky, Director of Paramount Pictures, for the first time. Jesse immediately took him out West as his guest to Hollywood, and all over California. The picture business was angling for Robert. It was then in its infancy, just about to burst from its swaddling clothes. Robert could probably have gone in on his own terms, and made Heaven knows what kind of a contract, but he spent the time in learning to play the ukulele from Bessie Lasky.

The Lasky household was very musical. Jesse, himself, had only just jumped from being a cornet player in a band to being a Director of Paramount, in control of many million dollars. There was something grotesque about the picture business: and Robert let his opportunity slip. He did not even recognise it as an opportunity, for he was neither a comic, nor an acrobat, nor a juvenile (Jannings and other great character actors had not yet appeared on the screen), and it was considered rather derogatory for a legitimate actor to play in pictures. The opening would always be there, he decided; meanwhile he was on holiday.

During his weeks in New York, he had been approached with ten offers for engagements at record salaries. Even as he was about to entrain for Hollywood, a representative from the Shubert office had dashed down to the Station waving a script

at him with a proposal of $3,000 weekly minimum and a percentage of the gross, if he would only play in *Tea for Two*, which had a cast of three. Robert's stock was booming. He should have taken advantage of his market, and worked. But he was on holiday. So, with the theatre tides of England and America washing the best to his feet, he retired, as it were, to a high hill and lay down in the sun; and the sensation was good.

When he left the Laskys he jogged up and down all over the Grand Canyon on a mule, accompanied by Eddie Knoblock. Then he slipped across the Pacific to Hawaii, where he was awed by the fire-crater of Kilauea; proceeded east and was next astonished by the Buddha at Kamatkura.

Soon he was in China. The letters he carried to those in power worked wonders. Dr. Wellington Koo, then Chinese Ambassador in London, had armed him with introductions to the Chiefs of Government in the North. In contrast to banquets given him in Peking, he spent two weeks with his head shaved in a Buddhist monastery. He spent another week exploring the tombs, and ten days along the Great Wall of China, and then returned to the monastery. Philosophy had always interested him, and he wished to understand Buddhism, the Gospel of the Middle Way, which was so difficult for one with his ardent desire-nature to comprehend.

He met Mei-Lung-Fang, the leading Chinese actor, whose chief roles impersonated women, as actresses are not known on the Chinese stage. Mei-Lung-Fang had hands and feet smaller and more beautiful than any woman in the east or west: yet it was Mei-Lung-Fang who took him to the Buddhist monastery.

Then Robert went on to Shanghai and Nanking, and Canton in the rebellious South. Civil War was raging then in China.

Hiding in Canton was his old friend Sun-Yat-Sen, who had discussed the formation of a Chinese Air Force years before with him in London. There was quite a story behind Robert's visit to Sun-Yat-Sen in Canton, as several of Robert's Chinese friends in the North had been Sun's enemies. However, as Sun wished to see him, he was taken off in a palanquin one evening,

at sun-down, with his eyes blindfolded, to spend a night with the great Chinese Revolutionary. And very embittered he found Sun, since all his work in China had resulted in the present disorder. From seven o'clock one evening until ten next morning Robert listened to the tragedies which had befallen the Chinese patriot, and was then blindfolded and taken back to his hotel in a palanquin.

After this he went by British gun-boat to Kuching in Sarawak, where he was to be the guest of the Brookes's[1]—old friends of his in London. And although the Brookes had already left for England, members of the Civil Service in Sarawak showed him how splendid could be the hospitality in that State, when they entertained him and took him into the hinterland of Borneo.

Seven weeks he spent in Sarawak, and they were probably the best weeks of his trip. Days went by chugging up the Rejang River, which became almost subterranean, so competely was it vaulted over by trees, as they made their way into the forest fastnesses of the Head-hunting Dyaks.

Then, with guides, they hacked a path through this forest, where tree-tops were so high they could never be seen: day was twilight: there was no hint of sky. At night they would camp on some clearing on a hill; and at dawn he would look over leagues of jungle, stretching away on all sides as boundless as the sea. A motionless floor of tree-tops would be interlaced by mats of scarlet, gold, or dazzling white creeper; and, even as he looked, this floor would be veiled by a shimmering haze as the sun rose higher. No sound broke the silence . . . not a stir shivered the tree-tops . . . so equal in their height that it was only where land heaved beneath them that ridges furled their surface like ocean breakers.

Here was a glimpse of the world primeval.

But it was fairly thickly man-inhabited world, for all that. Nights that were not spent on hill-tops were spent feasting with some Dyak Chief. To do the Englishmen honour on these occasions, the grandmothers of the village would dance round them, and feed them on vintage eggs that had been

[1]Sir Vyner de Windt Brooke, G.C.M.G., the White Rajah of Sarawak.

buried two hundred years. These eggs would be placed in their mouths by the old dames, and then snapped by them to the cackling of much laughter—the victim swallowed—there was no escape.

Of other crowded memories the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Burma impressed him even more vividly than the Taj in India, which he saw by traditional moonlight; perhaps this was because his attention here was distracted by a pack of jackals baying at the moon, as he had heard them bay twenty years before in Africa.

May 12th, 1921, found him taking leave of the East, bidding farewell to its noisy sunsets and pungent dawns, leaning over the deck-rails of a P. and O. mail-ship steaming out of Bombay harbour . . . watching the drift. His head was bare, foolishly, for the sharp sun-reflections glancing up from the water greatly increased the danger of sunstroke. The heat was torrid; the sun deemed over-powering, but he trusted for protection to his squiggle-mop of hair. His hair had grown inordinately long. His appearance was droll. He wore no tie, his shirt was open at the neck and loosely thrust into a pair of baggy white slacks. But he did not care, he was not out to create an impression. For ten months he had been the honoured guest. For ten months he had been taken to see world-famous monuments by people who implied that these monuments were honoured by his visit! Now he was going home to create his biggest successes. Of that, he was certain. Why not? He was in his prime, his health was good, what could stop him? But how and with what he was going to create these successes, he did not know; for as yet he had no plan.

The courtesies extended to him throughout his travels had disinclined him to bestir himself, although he was by no means sated of sensation. Indeed, the trip had whetted his appetite for diversion. More than ever at this moment he needed a call to stimulate him into action. His pockets were empty; his mind rich, stocked with pageants and strange tales, but he had found himself no pursuit that was fresh. A pursuit would have been an incentive to plan. But for the first time in his life he

was mentally unabsorbed, as it were at a loose end, wholly relaxed.

He, himself, was aware of danger in the symptoms and made up his mind to plan. He turned from the rails with this intention and caught sight of a girl standing thirty feet up the deck, looking in his direction.

They were the only two people on that wide promenade. Other passengers were taking the heat under fans in the saloon. But although she was looking in his direction, she was not looking at him; she was standing alone, fair, slight and very still—with that peculiar suggestion of brilliance which the tropics give to Englishwomen who have not become sallow and are dressed in white—unaware of his existence until he moved towards her. Then she saw him and realised she had been watched.

He advanced with the intention of speaking, but she turned straight through a doorway back into the saloon.

That brought him to a standstill; no woman had ever turned from him before.

Presently, he went through the doorway into the Saloon, but she had vanished. He searched two other saloons for her, in vain. Then, laughing at himself for being so foolish, he returned to his chair on deck and set his mind on other things by reading *Back to Methuselah.*

A few days later, he saw the girl again. But she was surrounded, and although he paced up and down past the group of people she was with, smiled broadly, and even entered into conversation with some one on the outer edge of the circle, he was given no encouragement. His haphazard attire—creased white slacks and open shirt—led them to think he was a planter, and *they* were a governmental circle.

Oddly enough, in spite of this cold-shouldering, it was the girl ultimately, who approached him. She came jumping over the steel divisions that separated his portion of the deck—an isolated triangle at the prow—one afternoon out of Port Said, and asked: "Has anyone else been here—Robert Loraine?"

He stopped pacing, and, to her surprise, said, "That's me."

He was now clad in a navy-blue pull-over and grey breeches,

and presented a trimmer figure than he had done in white slacks. His hair still curled on end, and gave him a startling and outlawed appearance, but his blue eyes shone merrily, and if he looked like a ticket-of-leave pirate, he also looked as though he were the person most enjoying himself on the ship.

The girl had been sent to fetch him. Word had gone round the pundits in the coffee-lounge that Loraine was on board. Imagine it, a celebrity, and no one had discovered he was on the ship until Port Said. This was because he never took his meals in the dining-saloon or mixed with the other passengers, but preferred to remain out of sight on the crew's deck at the prow. He must be enticed out of hiding, they decided; and the girl was sent under escort of a subaltern to find him.

Immediately Loraine showed what a queer fellow he was. He did not wish to meet people, except the girl, whom he courted openly. She was rather embarrassed and at a loss to understand this, because she was obviously attracted to the subaltern who was her own age, twenty-one. And, although Robert Loraine was young in looks and spirit, he was forty-five. There was almost the difference of a generation between them, no direct mental bond or point of contact. Besides, Loraine was astonishing. It was difficult to know how to take him. He was utterly unlike what one would suppose an actor to be: open-air, breezy, unpretentious, yet all-assuming, and with a forth-rightness that was quite unnerving.

They discussed Shaw and Barrie, whose works she knew almost as well as he. They overlooked a second-class concert-show from their own higher decks. Robert laughed uproariously at all the jokes. "I hate amateurs," said the girl, who was genuinely bored, and also thought the remark would appeal. "Do you? I love them," said Robert with evident gusto. "It's so rarely professionals aren't stale."

What other actor would have said that?

She liked the flat contradiction and unusual viewpoint of the reply. But he wearied her with long descriptions of relations between China and Japan, when she would rather have been listening to the subaltern's accounts of scraps with raiding Afridis on the North-West Frontier. She liked men to talk of

their jobs. Of Robert's achievements she knew nothing. Nor did he attempt to enlighten her. He would not have dreamed of speaking—had he been able to—to his Farman biplane about the horses that had carried him through the Boer War. Now, he was busy once again with a new sensation: her youth appealed to him, he was tasting life afresh.

It was not till they reached Tilbury that she found out about his military decorations. Then she saw a letter addressed to him while a steward was sorting the mail.

"Have you a D.S.O. and an M.C.?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, astonished at the question; but not nearly as astonished as she.

She knew men could not speak of their decorations, but she wondered why he had never mentioned the war or spoken of his experiences, instead of digressing on Sino-Japanese disturbances, in which, after all, he could take no part. She set great store on valour; she came of a soldier family. His medals impressed her.

In London, Loraine turned star. He discarded his flotsam-jetsam clothes and went visiting the theatres, taking her with him.

The first night they drove down Piccadilly in the half-light of evening. Lamps were pricking out. London was aquiver with the expectation which seizes her each June. Half-mad with excitement, Robert leaned towards the girl and asked: "Shall we take this city by the ears and make it *ours*?"

She was thoroughly taken aback by his vehemence and this splash of the bombastic. Moreover she did not believe he could do it; she had only seen him play in *Mary Rose*.

But he was well away, thinking what fun it would be to enter harness with her as companion. New to the theatre she would light each old point with sensation. Her reactions would bring him revelation. He was fascinated by her fragile appearance, her apartness, and her *mind*, which he believed was like his own had been at twenty-one. He was dipping back into his youth. Springtime was endless. As he had idealised his former loves, so he idealised her: with such a wife, he felt, he might soar into the empyrean.

On the third night they went to see Gerald du Maurier in *Bulldog Drummond*; after the final curtain they strolled round to meet Gerald, who told the girl some of his best stories, and asked Bobbie to bring her to family lunch at Cannon Hall on Sunday.

"People will be saying we're engaged," she said to 'Bobbie' uneasily, driving home.

"So we are," he replied.

Then she made it clear to him that she cared for the subaltern, and that all that was preventing their engagement from being announced was that they hadn't enough money to marry.

A pathetic little story filtered out to Robert, where he had stiffened back into the corner of the car, furious and cold. ' She had had three riotous seasons in India with the idea of making a brilliant marriage. Then, suddenly she had recoiled from this worldliness and match-making, nauseated. Now, she did not wish to marry any one famous or rich, or to gain by marriage at all, she wished to serve.'

Immediately Robert softened, there was that tug at his youth again. How well he understood the desire for self-immolation; how often at twenty-one he had longed to atone for falling short of the ideal. All his warm-heartedness rose in a desire to protect her as her voice went on about the subaltern . . . ' it would only be burdening him intolerably, you see, instead of serving him, if we were to marry without money.'

"How much could you live on a year——?" he interrupted.

"Oh, £2,000, I daresay . . ." she answered, vaguely.

"I'll give you £2,000——" cut in Robert. "Marry him and be happy."

The proposal was staggering. It left the girl overwhelmed.

It was all the more staggering, perhaps, since Robert's banking account at that moment was overdrawn by £225. But what was that or £2,000? As soon as he started playing he would polish off those amounts in a month or six weeks. He meant every word he said. It was no idle gesture. And the girl

was swift to react to his sincerity. It was the first bond between them.

Not that she would have accepted the offer. Nor would the subaltern. But who could fail to respond in spirit? And what should be more natural than that very shortly, when it was learned that his regiment objected to the subaltern marrying, she should become engaged to Robert.

They were married three weeks after, as soon as the banns had been called.

Never could any woman have had a more blissful courtship. It was tradition made perfect. She had only to express a wish to have it gratified. The earth was her footstool. Her room was a bower; every day he sent her roses. And when Loraine sent roses, they did not arrive by the bunch, but by the dozen dozen and the cartload.

They visited all his friends: the Shaws at Ayot-St.-Lawrence—Shaw approved of the marriage, he signed the register at the wedding—and Lady Wyndham, managerial doyenne of the theatre. (Lady Wyndham said frankly she could not think why Loraine was marrying a girl who brought no money to the partnership, who knew nothing of the theatre, and could serve no useful purpose.) Then, there were the Tommy Sopwiths at Horsley Towers; and the Princess of Monaco, at Claridges, with her own little court drawn from every London Embassy. Poets, painters, politicians, soldiers, aeroplane manufacturers . . . how 'Bob' showed his girl off to them, as though he had secured the Peri of the Universe. And to see the big fellow being so careful to be thoughtful and courteous, bottling up all his usual brusqueness, they thought he'd burst.

If a round of entertainment was the background, it was not the essence of their courtship. That lay, as in the case of all lovers, in the walks they had together: in their long evening strolls down the twilit streets of London; up one street, down another, hand clasping hand, rarely a word spoken. Magic London: magic twilight; sly moon that would come searching. Robert had not trodden such pavements since he was eighteen. Back came all his dreams, beliefs, and illusions:

life's lovely and surprising lustre. Some quality had altered the fabric of his days, transformed the commonplace, shot woof and web with light.

His most ordinary actions were fraught with anticipation: he lived in a current of suppressed excitement, rose with alacrity in the mornings, his feet shod with wings. Whisky, he did not touch, his mood was too lyrical. Abstinence made him thinner, elation brought back his good looks. He had clearly entered a new phase of existence. The girl became quite humble and adoring, magnetised by his high spirits. She was proud of his fame and of all the things he had done—told her by helpful friends—but prouder still that she had found a man in whom she could trust.

Days slid on, unjarred by any jolt or twist: idyllic. They went to Worthing for their honeymoon. Eddie Knoblock had lent Robert Loraine Beach House,[1] for a wedding present.

Beach House was small but spacious. Edward VII. had often week-ended there. The walls of the rooms were painted by Nicholson. There was a chain of French windows which opened on to terraces, and a wide, long lawn that sloped down between thick belts of woods to the sea. It was enchanting: Mrs. Loraine was delighted. It was better than she had ever expected, although if they had landed at some ducal home she would not have been surprised, as money seemed to be no object to Robert.

It was not until they had been living sumptuously for two weeks—riding, yachting, golfing—that she learned casually that he had borrowed £2,000 to marry her and provide for this honeymoon; of this sum £300 remained; at the rate they were living it would go in a few weeks.

The child-wife sat up among the roses. To say she was aghast would be to undermeasure feeling. She was dumbfounded. When she gave way to words, they were: "We will leave at once for London. You must go back to work. Oh, this has been lovely, and I have loved it, but you are not to burden yourself for me, I do not need these luxuries. It is you I care about. And when we reach London, the car can be sold."

[1]Now owned by the Worthing Municipality.

To blazes! Who was she to be dictating to him or planning the cutting down of expenses? That was his domain. Instead of lying back in the beauty he had provided, she was taking it upon herself to tell him what he was about. No one had ever done that before. How dared she?

As for work! In her total inexperience of the theatre, she did not realise that he would have to wait for an offer before starting work. He could not go and find it. He had to wait to be approached. He asked her if, by showing himself to be a pauper, she thought managements would be the keener to approach and engage him? Who was she in her dark ignorance to presume to lay hands on the guiding reins? He had only to find the right play for money to come flowing in, at once—*at once*. She believed him, and asked joyfully where was the play?

That was the climax. The storm broke. He had no play. But it was tactless of her to discover it. She was panic-stricken, not for herself, but for him. What could she do? She would have gone to her parents for help for him, but that he and they were no longer on speaking terms. She was not used to the theatre's way of living. He was not used to criticism. He found her lack of confidence insulting. How was he to explain that a play might come in at any moment, and that this kind of waiting was part of the theatre's game—she knew nothing, understood nothing, and was only fearful.

Too late, he saw that by seeking an outlet in marriage he had burdened himself with a yoke. Far from soaring into the empyrean with her, she would weigh down harness with anxiety. She was no inspiration, she was a blanket. All her attractiveness vanished, and too late, he wished he had never married.

This awakening was rough for them both.

It was a wonder—having regard to his nature—he did not leave her there and then. But he did not.

They stayed on at Beach House, riding, yachting. It was his wish. She was determined to serve him, so he gave her plays to read. She read them avidly, searching for salvation, as many as five a day. But the pile never diminished. As fast as she read a script, two other scripts came in. She was to learn

that every actor of standing was inundated with plays. Yet rarely did he find a winner more than once in six years.

No manager was approaching Loraine. No manager had a play with a Loraine part. There was an idea that 'Bob' must carry at least half the play or he would not accept the role. The lead in *Decameron Nights* for Drury Lane had been offered to him and he had refused it. Elsewhere, plays were on the change. Star leads were no longer the vogue. Detective dramas were coming in; crime was the rage. Even so, had Robert had a play like *Man and Superman* or *Cyrano*, he could then have approached any management to launch it. But he had only what amounted to a substitute for a play, called *Debureau*. It was no use suggesting Shakespere, for Shakespere was taboo then, in the commercial West End. So he had to think hard and wait—a situation he found galling when he wished to do well in front of his wife.

Fate was playing tricks on him.

They returned to town to live temporarily in his top-floor bachelor flat in St. James' Street. She was forbidden to mention 'money.' She tried her best to hide her anxiety, but she also tried to economise. Timorously, she suggested that they should walk instead of taking taxis. They had walked in the Summer: it would keep him fit. He did not wish to walk, and cured her of taxi-economy, by keeping their taxis waiting all through parties into the small hours of the morning. This made her so nervy, she almost burst into tears in public. She was threatening to disgrace him.

There was another matter which alarmed her. Whisky. He had never touched it while they were engaged, but now—whether it was due to the constraint of marriage or frustration in the theatre, who knows—night drinking had returned. And although alcohol never affected him at the time, it flew to his knee the next morning. The limp would be accentuated, the joint in pain. She became an adept at every ruse which tried to diminish drinking and failed.

Not that she dared mention the matter. She had learned wisdom motoring beside him in the honeymoon two-seater. If, when driving, she ever exclaimed 'Look out,' because she

was certain he had not seen an oncoming vehicle, he would throw both hands off the wheel. It was insulting to a driver to be told to 'Look out,' she was told; and at the last split second when a crash was inevitable, he was supreme. His hands would return to the wheel, and he would murmur, 'It's all right, my darling,' and it was. Two cars would merge and careen. Their buckled remains would be drawn to the roadside. Everybody would be the worse for the shock except Robert. But what was death to him, or beside him. And he had 'an irreducible minimum' of good driving which always brought his car through best out of the smash! Oh! She was learning!

"*People pay far too much attention to death*," he told her. "*That will come when it is meant to.* You should always go through life doing things as though you could do them." They did.

She no longer argued. Once when they were careering down one of the steep Kentish hills, at a mild seventy miles an hour, one of the car-wheels came off and streaked up a high bank over a hedge. She forced herself to say with complete indifference, "I've just seen our front wheel leave us and bound over the hedge, Robert. It looked so funny." He did not believe her, but he brought the car gradually to a standstill at the bottom of the hill. Then he walked back to find the wheel, over two-thirds of a mile. Statistics would prove that the car should have overturned. It did not. Maybe because the weight was his side and the wheel came off under her.

Suddenly, he ceased drinking and smoking, cut them out altogether, for he had made an arrangement to play *Debureau* at the Ambassadors Theatre. It was the smallest West End Theatre and none too auspicious for his opening after an eighteen months absence. He would never have agreed to play there had he not been forced into doing so by lack of funds. He was rather grim about this decision and the wife duly prepared to endure an actor's temperament during rehearsals. She was surprised out of herself by five peaceful weeks: Robert at work was always patient, considerate and self-controlled.

Debureau, produced in the late autumn of 1921 was a failure. It was off in three weeks. Robert plunged into a film;

the plot was poor, the photography worse, but the remuneration good. Then he agreed to play in a further pot-boiler, a detective drama. The move was desperate, Robert was never good in 'tec dramas, but he had now been seized by a minor panic. The £2,000 he had borrowed was not proving easy to clear, and, search as he might, he could not find the right play. His judgment had not been good: *Decameron Nights* was scoring a huge success at the Lane. Had he but agreed to play in it, his salary would have placed him on easy street, and his connection with a good management almost have restored him to his old position. As it was, two failures had temporarily pushed him out in the cold, dependant on such sporadic managements as were financing chance plays in the hope of striking a winner.

Everything was falling out as Vedrenne had forewarned. Managements with long theatre leases had settled on their stars while he was away world-touring; Frank Curzon was behind Gerald du Maurier at Wyndham's and Gladys Cooper at the Playhouse. If either of these stars had a failure they had only to rush on to the next play, or to do a revival. They were never out of the public eye, their backing was continuous, they had a home. Even the management of the Haymarket Theatre had followed their success of *Mary Rose* by a revival of *Quality Street*, featuring the same stars, Fay Compton and Leon Quartermaine. There was nothing for Robert to do but wait for a reshuffle. He knew the reshuffle would come, but the waiting was humiliating. He could never have believed it would have been so easy to topple out of success. He had yet to discover that the brighter the flame, the blacker the fall.

Meanwhile, his optimism was superb. As Smart had rightly said, the man was at his finest when up against difficulties. The situation could change at any moment, he told his wife. A fellow might blow in with the right play and the right part, and then, hey presto! After one success their course would be set. He could then easily obtain the backing necessary for his scheme of Shakespere and old English Comedy. It only needed one success. And there was much to support all he said. For although Robert was theatrically out in the cold, the telephone

never ceased buzzing with projected plays and plans. There were daily business luncheons or dinners, daily hope-soarings. And it was quite beautiful to see how he tried to guard his wife from disappointment—himself radiating optimism the while —for he knew that fully 99% of the propositions discussed in the theatre never materialised.

As for that wife . . . he was alternately beguiled or driven mad by the creature at home. The silly little thing had now conceived it was her duty to protect him. HIM. This was typical of the fantastic things that were happening. He wondered he had the patience to stand it, when he did stand it. Never before had he been supervised, or had his way of living criticised, unless he had asked for criticism. Not that she gave voice to her feelings, but her manner clearly indicated what was best for him. It riled him. Where was his freedom? And he was being forced now to consider the money angle. It was all preposterous.

Several times he had put his foot down and shown vigourously that what he meant to do, *he meant to do*, whatever the consequences. And the consequences had always been what she would have predicted—had he allowed her to predict—and this, too, was maddening, as he would have liked to prove how fatuous were her forebodings.

Equally maddening was her attitude of personal independance. She never followed his advice about herself. The silly little thing had once come in with a headache. "Take some aspirin," he ordered. "I never take drugs," she replied. At that he had clapped on his hat and vanished from the flat for three days—walked out without a word. What could he have to say to such a little prig. Any other wife, he thought, would have swallowed permanaganate of potash joyfully, had her husband told her, and thought no more about it.

It was all rather like Kate and Petruchio, with a difference. A tragic difference. As a result of harness, Robert was beginning to doubt the wisdom of his own judgment, to waver in his decisions. This had never happened to him before. Belief in himself was his main prop.

The wife happened to lunch one day with the Shaws alone.

"How are you two getting along?" asked the great man with a twinkle.

"Robert thinks association with me is undermining his authority," she answered very seriously, for she needed help. "No one has ever contradicted him before, he says. Now, I don't exactly contradict him. But, if you saw a baby about to put its hand in the fire, you would do your best to stop the baby —wouldn't you—and Robert doesn't realise he is the baby."

Shaw protested between laughter and tears that matrimony evoked a state . . . of . . . continual readjustment.

The wife was wrong. She should have realised that Robert could not—and should not—change at forty-six; he had his own way of doing things. She should not have tried to change them, she was only twenty-two.

Just around this time he broke his right wrist. It was her chance. He had to be nursed, dressed, and have his food cut up. She did all this and they became one and indivisible; the wife was his right hand, he said. She never left him: their hours were more wonderful than in their courtship days. Never had they enjoyed such understanding. Never had such understanding existed .The wife finished bandaging his arm after massage one day for the hundredth time and replaced it in the sling. "What is the best thing in life?" she asked, expecting he would say Love. "Friendship," replied Robert honestly.

He was missing his friends. Before he had married, the flat had been full of them. Now they did not come unless he telephoned for them. He could not be cooped up with one person when he was used to living with a squadron or else—alone. And, in his professional life, he was accustomed to sitting up until the early hours of the morning with authors, actors, producers, agents, either at the club or at home; bringing them back to the flat with him. But his wife had discouraged this practice because the end of the conversation always found them under the table with the exception of Robert. So Robert had given way on this, although he thought the suspension of night-sittings would probably damage his theatre connections, because the bedroom opened on to the carousal sitting-room, and he always protected his wife. He

would not have any scandal or smutty joke repeated in front of her; she was treated as a nun as far as the outside world was concerned. No man was so gallant to his wife as Robert was in public, or in private life either, if he felt in the mood, but the restrictions were telling on him. He could not belong to one person. He was a man's man, women were more possessive than Smart; he belonged to himself and when he lifted his voice, he liked to be answered by legion.

. . . . . .

Only one thing made him continue to endure the restrictions of marriage. He treasured the illusion that his wife was like Mary Ann Disraeli, who had crushed her thumb in the door of a carriage driving to a political union with Disraeli, and said nothing about it until the meeting was over. He thought his wife was like that, because one day during slack times the porter had come into the flat with: "A Police-Inspector is waiting for you downstairs, Sir. He says, will you come now, or shall he come up. He does not care to say what it is, Sir."

Loraine and his wife looked at each other. It had been a hang-fire day: two play-propositions had gone wrong: he had been unable to sign the lease of a small house that they were to have taken because he could not find the premium: arrest would be on a par with the other buffetings of their crazy existence. Had she been too clever—had he?

She rushed past him to the lift and slammed the door, so that she would be down the six flights first. He could not go as fast by stair. She met the inspector, and called back lightly: "Robert, you bad boy, you forgot to put away the car. The police have been watching it for six hours on the kerb."

He was deeply touched.

He saw she had meant to act as a buffer.

When they returned to their sofa in the circular sitting-room, he said: "D'you know, I wondered whether you had been too ingenious with your dress people." (Certain dress-designers were in the habit of sending her their models free to wear for a fortnight in the hope that she would then run up big bills. Robert would have bought her anything—he never

asked what she did with housekeeping money—but she would not have this.)

"And I thought you had been too ingenious over the premium for that house because you loved it," she replied.

"Oh well, my dear, we mustn't go on living like this in two rooms, cheek by jowl," he said. Then she told him she did not mind how closely they lived or what hardship they endured—providing only that it did not require the show of a harassing opulence—if they could see eye to eye and build towards a mutual stronghold. And, in the main, he didn't mind how close it was either, because he was certain the little thing meant well. So, between sunshine and storm, on summits and in valleys, by rough ways and pleasant, the first year of marriage, said to be the most difficult, came to an end.

CHAPTER XVI

ROBERT extricated himself from a welter of women—godmothers, nurses, wife and a baby girl—and came to London in October 1922, to produce *The Happy Ending*.

The play was a tragi-comedy by Ian Hay. It faded tragi-comically at the St. James' Theatre, being known as The Unhappy Ending.

Shaw dropped into the theatre, and later wrote to Robert. "You did not act in *The Happy Ending*, you held it up to derision. You have stepped outside the magic circle. . . ." Matters were serious. Nothing would have saved the Loraines from open ruin during the ensuing months had it not been for a fire and an insurance.

The fire broke out in some scenery stores on the South side of the river, and smouldered till it set the whole chain of stores ablaze. The Cyrano production was in one of the partitions that was entirely burnt out. This news looked like the height of calamity: for, apart from his earning capacity, Loraine had only two assets—a small wound pension, and the *Cyrano* play and production. However, a solicitor discovered that the production was insured for £8,000, and that his office had paid the premium. So the Loraines breathed again.

While the claim was being settled, Robert exchanged the cheerless atmosphere of home for the cheerful atmosphere of a hotel at Hove. Home was a rented furnished maisonette in Seymour St., quite bright except when, as in this case, the gas had been compulsorily turned off and the electric light was under notice. But a spray of orchids in the hall, relic from a first night, gave an atmosphere of prosperity if any one chanced to call.

At Hove he met Lady Wyndham, who asked him why he was without his wife. So he wired his wife to join him.

Down she came—after a trifling selling expedition to find the money for her ticket—armed with five new hats in their

band-boxes, a 'happy stay' present from the Princess of Monaco. (The old lady played the part of fairy godmother to the wife who was her maid-of-honour.) Robert did not meet the wife at the station, so she went on to the hotel, where at first she was hailed as a milliner, owing to the array of boxes on her arms. When it was learned she was Mrs. Loraine she was shown to a sitting-room. Robert was out riding, and for half an hour she watched the February sea through thirteen French windows which opened on to balconies, in a room seventy feet by forty. The room was deserted. Then she rang the bell and asked again to be shown to Mr. Loraine's room.

"But this is his room, Madam," replied the astonished valet.

"I thought they said it was a private ballroom."

"It is the Louis XV Ballroom and Mr. Loraine's private sitting-room, Madame. Your suite, Madame, is here, Madame. Allow me." And Robert's suite and her suite took up the remainder of the sea frontage on that floor.

Next day the wife went out and sold three hats, so as to send a postal order to the nurse to bring down the baby. Cash there was none. Robert was living in style on credit. Next time money was needed to tip a porter—and tips had to be lavish—the monthly wound instalment arrived just in time, and so the bluff went on. The wife was frightened out of her wits, as she had been brought up on the motto: 'Cut your coat according to your cloth.' But Robert declared that to show himself to be penniless before the payment of the claim would mean ruin. 'In order to receive money,' he maintained, 'whether it is due to you or not, you have to ascend to a moneyed plane.' And who can doubt it? World financiers have thought likewise, and proceeded on the same basis.

In due time the claim was paid, and after disposing of all debts and bills they were faced by a substantial surplus. This in itself was as awe-inspiring as any deficit. It was so unusual. They walked round and round the table, looking at the slip of paper which told the tale. It gave rise to

real worry with Robert. He could not decide on the best investment.

The possession of a Channel Island, he thought, might be the wisest. This island would grow its own cabbages, its own firewood, and have the natural sea-fish in its pools. Thither they could retire in times of duress or play-shortage, such as they had just come through, and face the world with indifference, demands for Income Tax with scorn. Accordingly he communicated with Compton Mackenzie for the purchase of the Isle of Jeton, and the wife waited.

Jeton proved to be too expensive.

The island dwindled to a house in Roehampton with the loveliest stretch of Richmond Park at the foot of the back garden. Robert had, at least, secured the best Park frontage; the folds of the wooded hills in front of his windows would have delighted Turner, Constable or Claude.

It was beautiful.

All that he needed now, to make him house-proud, were Arab ponies. These, he said, would scamper about the lawns and into the house through the French windows. They would feed from your hands and lie down in front of the fire like dogs. They would give the necessary touch to the place, for as pets they would be unique.

The truth was, he was finding domesticity tame, and could not think how to spice it up. But telephone extensions and electric light switches, his wife maintained, were the more urgent problems. As soon as these were installed, the money ran out.

Robert at that time—Autumn, 1923—was playing at the Haymarket Theatre in *The Prisoner of Zenda*. It was a venture financed equally by Tony Prinsep and himself, and one that was locking up a certain amount of money without playing to very big business.

"Furnish on the hire basis," he told his wife, "and complete the place immediately." But she objected. "Your money will go down the drain," she explained. "There is only one way to realise on every purchase—invest in *antiques*."

This was a contrary pull, and although Robert could see

reason in it, contrary pulls made him ill. "She is killing me," he thought, "with the best intentions."

He liked his feet to sink into rich velvety carpets, to see his windows framed in heavy ample curtains. Instead of this, the wide dining-room bay was masked by thin and meagre blinds; a temporary measure, but one that was irritating. For all his love of campaigning, he loved comfort. As if in mockery of this, his dining-room exhibited a deal kitchen table flanked by two white kitchen chairs. It mattered not at all to him that this table was disguised by the finest napery and set with supper dishes from recipes procured from the chef at the Savoy—dishes that took half a day preparing, while the other half was spent by the wife at Christie's and Sotheby's collecting antiques carefully on inadequate funds—this made no difference. Things were not as he wished. He had not even the money to furnish on a hire-purchase system as he wished. The property became a burden, a bane, a thorn. He put it up for sale again. Finis.

Even in this, matters were not to be as he wished. There were no purchasers for semi-country places in winter, although the park re-clad itself each day in varying loveliness. In the meantime, the engine of his new car—instalment basis—had to be kept from freezing. Alas! The garage was only fitted with a coke furnace. "Old-fashioned and dirt-making," declared Robert; and went off and found an electric radiator which he ran off the light. In vain the wife protested that the heat it generated was insufficient and the cost was 4/- an hour. If she mentioned cost, Robert felt like smashing windows. He ran the radiator, and at the end of the quarter an electric consumption bill came in for £135.

Of course, there was no paying this, and the bill was returned to the wife to keep circulating through inquiry departments, and temporise.

She had been proved right again—but at what a cost! She would rather have been proved wrong. These were the years that should have marked the height of his career, instead they were marking a trail of non-achievement. Where was it all leading?

In unspoken penance for the electric light bill, Robert accepted an engagement to play in *The Way of the World*, at Hammersmith. He himself felt that to recede to a suburban theatre after appearing at the Haymarket would do him harm. But Nigel Playfair was fast wiping out any feeling that the Lyric, Hammersmith, was a suburban theatre. Under his management it became an outpost of the West End and the resort of the intelligentsia.

It was a privilege to be present at any performance of *The Way of the World.*

There was the wit and worldliness of Congreve set off by Nigel's highly individual flair for decor, titillating song and dance interludes, and novel presentation. The dancer was Elsa Lanchester, clever and unexpected; the comedienne was Margaret Yarde, whose comedy was as broad as Niagara; and the *Millamant* was Edith Evans. A peerless Millamant which marked the arrival of Edith Evans, who has never had the chance to do anything quite as perfect again.

Of all parts in Old English Comedy, Millamant is the most sparkling, and Edith Evans extracted every glitter. By no means physically beautiful, her appearance in white wig and costume was utterly surprising, transcendingly lovely; she was more alluring by far than any accepted beauty, and her power to shimmer in this part kept her audience wondering whether she was really a woman or a drop diamond.

If Millamant offers the actress boundless opportunities, *Mirabell*—her lover—may be classed as the most ungrateful and difficult part ever written. Mirabell has to balance Millamant, with scarcely a line from the author to help him do it. Yet every character speaks of Mirabell as a wit, rousing the audience's expectation by exclaiming: 'Here comes Mirabell.' Once on the stage, the man is left rapt and speechless listening to Millamant. One tiny speech relieves the character from utter dumbness, and brings down the curtain to Act II. But, as if to emphasise the paucity of Mirabell's situation, that speech was never heard on the opening night, for the curtain fell by mistake just as Robert started to speak it.

The wife rushed round to the back of the stage. What

would happen? Robert, who disliked playing secondary parts, had been robbed of his one moment of distinction. How terrible he must be feeling!

He was indeed feeling so terrible that he was rushing round to meet her. "Oh, my darling, don't grieve; it can't be helped; don't grieve," were his words.

As always, in every crisis, his childishness had fallen from him. There was left the man and his concern for others involved in his misfortunes. Any other actor would have raved. Not Robert. And his wife echoed the feelings of Vedrines, who fifteen years before had exclaimed: 'At that moment I forgave him all his stupidities, because behind them what a man he was to serve.'

CHAPTER XVII

THE *Way of the World* brought luck; to be associated with any success always attracts attention. Leon M. Lion appeared on the scene with a play called *Tiger-Cats*. It was a marriage drama dealing with the intrigues of devil-wives, and Robert was to be the husband, if a woman for wife could be found.

He immediately suggested Edith, and the burning question then became: Would Edith have sufficient sex-appeal when she dropped 'costume' for ordinary clothes?

Edith settled this doubt with a sledge-hammer—no other comparison could be used—and, as the red-wigged Parisian devil-wife Suzanne, her sex-appeal almost knocked the audience out. It was like no brand of sex-appeal ever seen, but she was quite rivetting. *And she was a Tiger-cat.*

The play was tried out very successfully in a series of special matinées at the Savoy; and when the run of *The Way of the World* was over it passed into the evening bill at the Garrick. Robert and Edith were superb. Their personalities were totally unlike, but their individual weight was matched. Consequently the struggle between them for supremacy in marriage was real and horrifying. No husband and wife could go and see the play without recognising some of their own experiences. The show gripped.

Press notices, of course, went entirely to Edith. She had followed Millamant by a part in which she was sensationally different, as far removed as the equator from the pole, but just as attractive. Several years later, in a revival of *Tiger-Cats*, the same critics condemned Edith in the same part, although she had kept strictly to the same performance. They went over to Robert then, because he had become the recognised exponent of tortured stage husbands. But this time his performance passed unnoticed, except by an American actor, David Warfield, who immediately cabled David Belasco that

he should secure the play and Robert for New York. Edith's performance struck Warfield as 'exaggerated.'

So to New York in the Autumn of 1924 went La Famille Loraine—by now a wife with two daughters—behind Robert, who was on a splendid contract. He had a minimum of £400 a week with a share of the gross which, when business was good, took this up to over £1000. David Belasco was a name to conjure with in New York; and the play, when Robert left it in London, was drawing to capacity. Success seemed assured.

He had had it all his own way with the American contract, and this was due to the foresight he had displayed in making his original contract with Leon M. Lion. (A foresight that testified to a capacity for sheer hard-headed business dealing, which was totally unlike his other characteristics, and seemed to descend on him in flashes.) In this contract, as part payment for his services in acting for Leon M. Lion, he was to have the first refusal of the American rights of the play at £250. He bought these rights after the first Matinée and the wife pawned some jewels she had just inherited, to enable him to pay the £250. (For, in spite of the success of the *Way of the World*, there was still the Roehampton house to maintain, and debts, and home-furnishing, and no way of laying hold of a round sum like that at once.)

But as this was the play that was to end all money-shortage, she willingly threw down the ornaments before the theatre Juggernaut, marvelling that for the temporary sacrifice of so little they would shortly be obtaining so much. Robert was now the owner of a successful play: accordingly to the New World they sailed, entertaining greater hopes of it than were ever held by Columbus.

Alas! for all the reputation of David Belasco and the established following of the Belasco theatre, and the charm of Katherine Cornell, *Tiger-Cats* failed. It was withdrawn at the end of six weeks.

Katherine Cornell took the part of Suzanne. To date it is the only failure she has had. Great actress that she was, and is, she lacked the necessary weight to play the devil-wife

against Robert. She was only the Tiger-kitten. There was no menace to her; the audience were always waiting for Robert to put her across his knee and administer the necessary corrective spanking. Edith was the one and only one to play that part against him. And Robert was the one and only one to play that part against Edith. In London, where these two had been filling the Garrick to capacity, Arthur Wontner took Robert's place as the husband. The show wilted. Wontner gave a most sensitive performance, but there was something about his personality that made him seem hardly worth the breaking. *Tiger-Cats* was shortly withdrawn. The runs in London and New York were spoiled by this splitting of the partnership. If only Robert had played out London first, and then taken Edith to America!

He realised this all quite clearly at one of the early rehearsals with Belasco, and went through a brainstorm that turned his hair temporarily white. Then, as if to console himself for this false step, he behaved exactly as if he had had a success. The money made in salary was frittered away in high living. The Loraines lived in a flat overlooking Central Park, on the corner of Sixth Avenue. Loraine never left bed until 1 p.m., but he never reached it until 6.30 a.m. He let slip offer after offer for engagements, and indulged in a round of supper parties.

It was during this time, at a semi-official Eve of Armistice function he was attending, that a man came up and gripped him warmly by the hand. The stranger mentioned his name, mentioned 40 Squadron, and Robert returned the salutation coldly. "Say, Bob," said one of his friends when the enthusiast had left, "I never knu you knu X so waal."

"That fellow," said Robert. "I put him out of my Squadron in 1917."

"Waal, I wouldn't talk too loud about that," was the reply. "He's a Chief of Police in New Yark. . . ."

The end to the Loraines' heedless living was inevitable. The family trooped back to England and Robert, broke to the wide, floundered through nine months' unemployment at Roehampton.

One spar kept him afloat. An Italian film company had done a colour picture of *Cyrano*; it was a super film. But to show it in England they had to have English-speaking captions; and any such captions were an infringement of his English-speaking rights. So, before they could release the picture, they had to pay Robert £1,400. This sum supported the family throughout a Spring and Summer of blunting non-achievement, and then Robert returned to America to play with Ruth Chatterton in *The Man with a Load of Mischief.*

He remained in America chasing the dollar until the late Summer of 1926. New York salaries were higher than salaries in London, and money was of increasing importance with an increasing family, as a third baby was expected.

The wife stayed behind at Roehampton.

. . . . . .

It was to be the parting to end partings.

They had never parted before, and each felt the separation keenly. But Robert had to make money and put an end to this intolerable financial situation; and the wife had to have the baby.

They were both determined that this torture should bear fruit.

She had planned to re-decorate the house and complete the as yet ever-uncompleted furnishing—out of the housekeeping. Not a bill would meet Robert when he returned. And it was to be a surprise: kept a secret. His was a generous allowance, hers a frugal way of living; he should be proud of his home. She would re-furbish the two-acre garden and clean up the stables . . . the gardener and she would wield a paint brush in some of the rooms in the house, the others would have to be left to decorators. But the planning would all be cut to order so carefully that not a brass tack would go astray.

Robert, on his side, was making genuine efforts to turn into a reliable 'provider.' But harness and a narrow path were hard for a man who had always lived under the excitement of branching down tracks that were new. Moreover, he had never found money so hard to make as now that he had to make it. Some malicious fate was twisting the works.

The dollar eluded him. He was tossed from play to play—short runs all—and he only managed to secure engagements each time just as his funds were running low. The New York season for him was a progression of nightmares. His planets were crossed in very truth; plans refused to mature as they were meant to do.

Time and again he pondered the situation. For if Robert's sum total appeared to be irrational and spontaneous, it was not for lack of trying to follow a pre-arranged plan of action. Besides, he was now fifty years old.

"Solving the financial problem must be the first aim," says his diary on the fiftieth birthday. "Have started regimen of abstinence from tobacco and alcohol. Hope for more energy to-morrow."

It speaks volumes for his powers of self-control that he was always able to cut out smoking from fifty to seventy cigarettes a day and heavy drinking, at a moment's notice. These spurts of abstinence denoted spurts of endeavour and placed him under a heavy strain—which he tried to mitigate by chewing gum!

"Felt beginnings of a new vitality," says his diary three days later. "The effect of alcohol and nicotine may be spasmodically stimulating, but it is also generally narcotic, lethargic and de-vitalising. Its withdrawal is accompanied by fatigue for awhile before vitality is established."

Later: "Have completed five weeks of regimen of abstinence, and what achieved. Mastery over three great drawbacks: alcohol, sleeplessness, nicotine. Rose 9 a.m. Dispatched four plays. Read *Prisoners*; useless to me. Played Matinée well. Saw part of dress rehearsal of *Goat-Song*. Pretentious rubbish; cannot succeed. Played evening roughly; thoughts were too disturbed. Laurette (Taylor) and Hartley (Manners) came round. Supper at Laurette's. Noel Coward, Roland Young and wife, Ethel Barrymore and Edgar Selwyn there.

"Home 4 a.m. Observed regimen except for chianti at supper. Had idea of doing tabloid *Cyrano* in Vaudeville."

Of course, once chianti appeared at supper, it heralded the breaking up of abstinence. But it was a pity that when he

had disciplined himself to such moderation, Fate should have seen fit to deal him her hardest blows.

Salaries earned in America were eaten up by rests between engagements, and when Robert returned to England in the summer of 1926, he entered a home that had been transformed in which he was housed in luxury with literally scarcely a shilling in hand to allow him to stir out. It was a haven in which he lay becalmed.

Times were bad.

There was one stir: Shaw's *Arms and the Man* was revived at the Everyman, Hampstead, with an excellent cast. Robert played Bluntschli better, he thought, than ever. Critics commented on his sensitive approach to the well-known part. Excellent and well-known were the epithets, and the latter won. The production did not come to the West End.

If only Robert could have got hold of a new Shaw play. But G. B. S. was in Italy at the time, and all his new plays were going to Sir Barry Jackson as a reward for having put on *Back to Methuselah*, and losing a high sum in the cause of high art. Besides, somehow or other Robert had lost touch with him.

The situation was ridiculous. Here was Loraine, looking younger than he had done after the War, fitter—because he had no limp—and acting better, he was certain, than he had ever acted before, yet he could get no work.

Never as yet had he searched the dramatic sky and found it vacant. The prospect was so desolate, he would have boarded a tramp steamer and gone off with his wound pension to some out-of-the-way port to try his hand at something fresh, but that he could not leave his family. The wife went everywhere with him now. She spent long days at the theatre when he was rehearsing occasional Shakespere. A random Sunday night and Monday matinée was all that he could get; the only way he could come before the public; acting either Petruchio, Mercutio, or Othello, for nothing with the Fellowship of Players.

Instead of making money by his profession, it was costing him to practise it. Always on these occasions some sum like

17/6 spent on his costumes had to be made to look like £50. The wife and the nurse re-fangled costumes out of stock. And so the bluff went on—it worked; friends thought he was resting because he liked it—but the struggle was appalling.

It seemed impossible that the changelessness of the days should go on without being broken by some cataclysm that would reveal their circumstances; but there was no cataclysm and the days went on, heavy, grey, unbroken. Loraine was thinking hard; he had to do *something*.

A man had set up a petrol pump on the Kingston Road and was coining money. Why had Loraine and the wife not thought of doing that? What about flying? But younger men than he were in the air, finding it difficult to obtain finance. Should he try and fly the Atlantic? he asked. Would she like him to do it? She would not. What then? An Air epic? Should he write one? What about a film showing the history of the Royal Air Force? That was an idea. Would any Film Company attempt it?

Careful investigation led to the belief that they would if the Air Ministry would lend assistance by providing what were now out-of-date machines, and pilots. The Air Ministry agreed to do this *if* the Air Council approved of the Picture firm, and the director and scenario. The scenario was obviously the thin edge of the wedge; here, then, was a hope to work for. Robert set his teeth into writing it.

The matter was kept very hush-hush in case some one else should steal the idea. Winter went by digging into official records and agonising over the form of the story. *Journey's End* had not appeared then, and a love-interest was considered essential in any play or film. However, after many drafts, the love-interest was thrown overboard and the tale emerged clean and clear as a gripping record of the Royal Air Force—showing the rise from an expeditionary Force of eleven machines into one that numbered many, many times eleven hundred. In order that the film might not lack human personality, these developments were centred round the adventures of seven characters, three of whom went out with the first

eleven machines, while the other four were alive to take part in the end-of-war dog-fights.

The reason for every air reconnaissance, air engagement, or bombing expedition was clearly shown . . . and consequently, as readers of the scenario, or watchers of the film, were aware of the importance of the objective, they underwent the same suspense over the outcome of the expeditions, as was originally felt at Headquarters. Sometimes the outcome was successful, sometimes the Squadrons met with defeat; defeat always gravely retarded the achievement of air supremacy; but finally the Flying Corps grew into the Royal Air Force and swept to victory.

It was a grand scenario, one of absorbing interest, because it was a record of facts.

Sir Philip Game at the Air Ministry liked it, and after due deliberation, the Air Council also approved. All this time—for the writing of the scenario and its approval had taken over seven months—needs at home were growing more and more pressing. No offer of a part had come to Robert. Had the wife not just been endowed with a small income from a Trust Fund (inaugurated for the children by her parents) the Loraines could never have held out. At last Robert received a letter conveying the approval of the Air Council, with a further letter saying that they attached great importance to the director of the Film having an intimate knowledge of the Royal Air Force. Had the firm he proposed to do the film agreed that he should undertake this work?

As yet he had approached no firm; but, armed with this support, he went round the companies. Here came snag No. 1: with one exception, all these companies thought it would be necessary to have the chief pilot in the R.F.C. a girl who would land at German Headquarters and vamp the Commander-in-Chief out of his secret plans. They could not see that the film was a semi-official record. Eventually the firm of Gaumont—forerunner of Gaumont British—realised the pictorial possibilities of the work. They understood that:

> Until now, aeroplanes had appeared as indefinite specks on the screen, whereas in this picture they were

to be photographed at close quarters from a machine flying alongside (this was accomplished eighteen months later in the American air picture *Hell's Angels*) and shown diving, looping the loop, and crashing in flames. Thus the great aerial dog-fights with 100 and more machines engaged were bound to be spectacular. In a word, aeroplanes were to be co-stars with the seven officers whose adventures were depicted.

Gaumont wanted to do the film using Robert's scenario and with Robert as General Director.

Circulating these companies had taken another two months.

There were still further points to be settled: principally the Air Council's specifications as to the length of the film, the distribution, and the financial standing of the producing firm. Finally all this was cleared, and a meeting was arranged between the Chairman of Gaumont's and the Director of Contracts at the Air Ministry.

At long last everything seemed settled—and Robert would soon be touching £1,000 as well as being engaged in congenial work. He had put his whole heart into this Air Force film.

Then, whether it was that the Gaumont Company required more assistance in the matter of planes than the Air Ministry was disposed to give, or whether the Ministry was besieged by too many applicants (once the scenario had been circulated, rivals had swarmed) and began to doubt the wisdom of allowing any Air Force Film to be made, is not known. Anyway these parleys ended in July, 1927, with a letter from the Director of Contracts to Robert, saying:

"I am to inform you that full consideration has been given to the matter in all its aspects, and it is regretted that the Department has been unable to accept the proposals of Messrs. the Gaumont Company Ltd.

"I am, however, to thank you for the interest you have shown in the matter——"

And so another year's work ended in smoke.

. . . . . .

"The only way to meet our situation," Robert told his wife with studied jocularity, "is by masterly inactivity."

She nodded. She was not good at humorous replies under trying circumstances, and she was too young to understand the philosophy behind this remark, or the control it implied from him. Every asset on which money could be raised had drifted from the Loraines into safe keeping.

Where were they to turn?

Overhead was an unblinking summer sky.

Robert had led her, as always, to a window overlooking the Park before he told her the difficult news. It was easier to take that way.

He himself evinced no sign of depression. He never did. He might display a roaring temper, or plunge into sulks, but be depressed, never. A man who "belly-ached" was not a man. And this made difficulties almost more hard to bear, because the wife would have liked to comfort him. It would have given her an outlet. She should have been grateful for his buoyancy, but she often found it unreal.

He would seek her out with ringing footsteps—even on carpets his footsteps seemed to ring—before departing on one or other of his fruitless undertakings; crack jokes, and leave with some grand optimistic gesture, which greatly heightened heartache and suspense.

Where would it end?

And under his trials he was so undeniably great. The world would never know it—that was one of the chief causes of her heartache. She would have liked the world to know that devil or saint, prophet or fool, here was a man—a great man who was being wasted.

What Robert himself felt was his own secret.

When he felt it too deeply for the optimistic gesture, he would retire to his own room and lock the door, draw the blinds to shut out the sunlight, and meditate.

The children at such times were kept as silent as the grave. Despair stalked through the house. If any one knocked at his door he did not answer. If they knocked twice he would dress and dash out of the house and not return for days. And that

was so unspeakably frightening. He had to be left alone until he recovered. And when he recovered no one was to ask him how he was. The time he spent away from them was to pass unobserved.

Books by his bedside were Bligh's *Direction of Desire*, Lord Avebury's *Pleasure of Life*, *Essays of Prentice Mulford*, *Peace and Happiness*. Distracted, baulked and humiliated, he would lie in the dark, and presently switch on a tiny glimmer of light and read a Chapter on Aspiration or Contentment.

"I am very much attracted," says Plutarch, "by the remark of Diogenes when he saw a stranger at Lacedaemon preparing himself with much ostentation for a feast. '*Does not a good man consider every day a feast?*' Aye, and a very great feast, too, if we are only wise."

Or:

"Seek not that things should happen as you wish, but wish the things that happen to be as they are, and you will have a tranquil flow of life. . . ." And so on until he became normal once more.

As soon as he was calm again, he would re-ponder the situation. He knew his present predicament was the outcome of all he had done. But the outcome of all he had done before had been success. Why had it changed? In what was he different? He could not fathom it out. And over the circumstances he would go again. What had he missed doing, or what should he not have done?

He had brought more hard work and exact thinking to the Air Film than had gone to any of his resounding achievements. He had shown greater endurance during the past months than had been required of him during the War. Yet he had only fallen down an abyss. He was acutely conscious of his situation; over-conscious because of his pride and independence. Authors who had once flattered and fawned on him, avoided him at the Club. Or he fancied they did. If a theatre manager saw him coming down the street, he slipped away up a side turning. Or so Robert imagined.

And Fate, that had always been kind to him and provided him with a means of escape in some fresh pursuit, was now

fastening on him with an iron grip. He was not to escape. He was to be driven in on himself; he who would have run to the ends of the earth to avoid meeting himself, was to know himself, see himself.

It was as if he, who had been cast as a super-silhouette against the dawn of Shaw, of Flying, of Romance with Cyrano after the War, was now to enter and create a light within himself without a spark of hope for tinder-flash. A light that would illumine the dark wastes of despair and steppes of hopelessness. And the pain of entering his own spirit was almost more than he could stand. What had he done to deserve such punishment? Why could he find no outlet?

Baffled, battered, lost, he would start to re-read again:

"There is no fool," said Cicero, "who is happy, and no wise man who is not."

"Let not melancholy mark you for her own. . . ."

"It has been said that an Irishman is never at peace except when he is fighting, a Scotchman never at home except when he is abroad, and an Englishman never happy unless he is grumbling. . . ."

He was seeking to escape through the minds of others. And far removed to the point of gibberish as the words and thoughts might seem against the racings of his mind, he would read till the words made sense and the thoughts became clear, and he was calm again. He would not have his mind imprisoned or governed by his distress.

The Air Film had not been his only disappointment. He had entered into a partnership with Edgar Wallace, newly-arrived playwright, to do Wallace's play *The Squeaker*. He had even obtained backing for *The Squeaker* because of Wallace's success with *The Ringer*. But at the end of seven weeks' get-together, Wallace had written him:

"You have not been associated with any kind of dramatic success in London for years. It is terribly easy for you to make a mistake remembering the shifting requirements of a London audience. I cannot afford to have that mistake made . . ." and broken up the partnership.

Robert tried to patch it up, but Wallace would have no

patching. He had decided against any partnership with Loraine.

After that Robert took down the *Book of Job*. Clearly nothing he touched would come right. All he had done to deserve the Wallace partnership-breaking was to have certain models made of the quick scene-change devices necessary to ensure uninterrupted action throughout the play. Wallace had taken offence over—well, it does not matter now; Wallace followed every one of Robert's devices later when he produced *The Squeaker*. They were new at the time and Robert's own; he always liked to pit his mind against scene problems and solve them.

If Fortune had lavished opportunities on him before, she was now taking everything away. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. . . ." Robert took to spending longer days in his room with the blinds drawn to shut out the sun.

He would see no one, speak to no one. He was obliged to fulfil one public engagement to speak at a dinner. The speech did not go as he wished, and he retired to the dark to recover from his shame. A magnified shame and an altogether imagined ridicule. He stayed so long, the family did not think he was coming out again.

Among people who phoned—and the phone had to be answered very carefully when times were bad—was Milton Rosmer, who had once played Christian in *Cyrano*. Rosmer was now in Management at the Everyman, Hampstead. He wondered whether Robert would care to play in a tragedy by a Swede whose name was practically unknown in England, in August, at the Everyman.

August is a town-deserted month, and the combination of August, Swede, tragedy, Everyman, was so funny that Robert did not answer. Then Rosmer spoke to the wife, and a week after that Robert was persuaded to look at the script.

On the evening of what had been a scorching day he asked his wife whether she would like to hear him read it. They were both more tired than they should have been for a play-reading, as she had been doing the chores all day, and he had been figuring out a budget. But he began.

At the end of the second Act, she was on her knees before him with hands clasped, interrupting the play to assure him that all his children were his own, and he was not to believe a word he had read. "If *The Father* upsets you like that," said Robert, "there may be something in it. Shall we do it?"

They went and stood by his study window to look out over the hills of Richmond Park.

"Of course," said Robert, "the Everyman is merely a barn. The stage is right on top of the audience, and there is no orchestra space between stage and stalls to help create illusion. And it is to be put on at the beginning of August. Rosmer can pay £10 expenses a week during performances, but that will not re-fund what it will cost me going up there for rehearsals. Can I afford to do it? Do you think I can?"

Stabbed across her memory his remark of six years before, "Shall we make London ours?" And, "always go through life doing things as though you could do them." The contrast drove to her heart like a knife. He had not even said, "I cannot afford to do it," but had asked her opinion. Where was the original Robert? Who and what would pick him up?

The pain this brought showed her a way of withstanding the never-ending money siege for a little longer, so that she was able to look at him brightly and answer with astonishment: "But of course, of course you can. . . . ."

CHAPTER XVIII

THEIR LIVES were always melodramatic, even when they set about living them in the most ordinary fashion.

The remaining days of July, 1927, unfurled under sweltering skies, the kind of heat-wave that is so welcome by the sea and unbearable in town. Every morning Robert went up to the Everyman, and on several evenings he returned in a despondent mood saying they seemed to be losing sight of this play *The Father*. All the ingredients for titanic effects were there, and yet, and yet . . . His wife was not allowed to go up and see, because she was to attend the rehearsal before the last and obtain a view of the whole.

When this view came, she was crushingly disappointed.

"I wish he would let himself go," whispered Milton Rosmer, producer, to her in the stalls. She did not reply because it seemed to her that the treatment of certain scenes would have to be altered before Robert let himself go, or the 'letting go' would be false. But as the star's wife is traditionally a nuisance to him and the management, she waited and told Robert.

"Shall I throw up the part?" he asked when she had finished, thereby fully proving the theory of wife-nuisance.

Obviously he could not do that, still less could he give an inadequate performance. The date was Saturday, July 31st, and *The Father* was due to open on Tuesday, August 3rd.

"Let's ask Milton Rosmer to come and see us," she said.

Milton Rosmer came out on the evening of Sunday, August 1st. Fahrenheit was 82° in the shade, and he was finishing the last of a bag of plums he had brought to quench his thirst down the long walk to their house.

"Plums are a sure sign of Autumn," he said bravely, mopping his brow. (Autumn being the season of theatre-goers, and nothing being more certain than the existing heat-wave to keep people out of the house.)

"Robert is exercising to reduce," she informed him gravely. "Loss of weight makes such a difference to his expression."

"If only he would let himself go," said Milton Rosmer again. Then began the long talk. It lasted from 6.30 to 11.30 p.m. without a break, and it was not until the end that any one remembered to touch their drinks. It was far from being one of those comfortable traditional theatre talks over cigars —there was not even a smoke. The cold meats and fruits lay neglected on the sideboard; wasps swarmed. Later, battalions of moths hurled themselves against the lampshade and fell in a little circle of slain under the light—while Milton Rosmer pencilled down notes. The length of these was of his own making, he argued each point before he either accepted or dismissed it, treating Robert's wife as an onlooker who had come fresh to the play, and considering her views in the way that a newspaper editor will sometimes consider a reader's letter.

"Nothing so forceful as this Strindberg stuff," he said, "and nothing so elusive to perform."

And again their heads would meet over the centre of the table tracing each Strindberg mood to its source in urgent rapid undertones. They were a desperate trio. *The Father* was Milton Rosmer's last throw at the Everyman; he had come to the end of his funds. Funds did not exist for Robert Loraine. Yet none of them expected fortune to come from this play, any more than they expected gold to rain from the sky. They had been magnetised by a tremendous force, the force of a man called Strindberg; they were not going to be baulked, they were going to transmit that force from the stage. The play, and nothing but the play, was of all they thought.

Next morning Milton Rosmer re-directed the cast at rehearsal in a way that materially altered the movement of scenes without shattering the nerves of the company by last-minute changes.

"There," he said courteously to Loraine's wife when the players had dispersed. "That covers all your points, and I believe they are all improvements."

"And yet the play doesn't move," she said, looking at him. "What is it?"

She had thought her points would make all the difference. True that climaxes now came easily to a head and that Robert was playing in his part as right as he could be, but the play still refused to come into being. What was it?

"Ah, well," replied Rosmer evasively, very worried, "the cast will have to play it on their nerves. Wait for an audience." No hope as dangerous as waiting for an audience to make a play move. And they knew it.

At home, Robert went through his part and again through his part, searching for some clue by which he could focus the play; some centrifugal point, without which the play became a series of monstrous incidents, which, owing to their exaggerated nature might even collapse into farce. His wife could hand him back the intonations he had used the first time he read the play to her, and made such an impression. But the secret did not lie in intonations; these were merely the result of something—what?

Adolf—his part in *The Father*—is a scientist driven crazy by years of unhappy marriage. His wife wishes to direct the education of their daughter, on which they again differ, and in order to gain her ends, instils a doubt into his mind that he is not the father of his child. (Fatherhood cannot be proved!) Simultaneously she has a doctor to the house to prove he is insane. The doubts are so insidiously distilled into the husband's mind, that at the end of a quarrel scene between them which ranges in emotional span from Heaven to hell, he throws the lighted lamp at her. This action seems to break down the last vestige of his self-control, and for a while he actually becomes insane, proceeding from violence to violence, driven to pulling the trigger of a revolver in his mouth—only to find it is not loaded—and being finally lured into a strait-jacket by his old nurse, the only woman he has ever trusted, who pretends she is dressing him in his childhood's finery. She straps him down and, when he returns to a momentary flash of true consciousness, the horror of his situation results in a stroke. As until now his *mind* has

been safe from both the subjugation and machinations of his wife.

In all literature this drama is the example of perfect play construction. It cannot be compressed; it has to be seen. Woman-hatred is said to have inspired Strindberg to write it. But all his life he was the victim of his love for women and, up to the moment of writing *The Father*, not one of them had remained faithful to him. So *The Father* is really a drama about Love, and that is the play's great strength.

Next day was Tuesday, August 3rd, the opening. The company were to run through the play in the set or scene for the first time in the morning. This is always slightly disconcerting to a cast, as actors are interrupted by real doors or furniture which has hitherto been imagined or substituted. "I say, old man, is this table meant to be here?" cries some one. "The table has always been there," replies the producer. "Well, really, old man, really, really," replies the indignant player, whose conception of the hitherto unseen table has been very, very different.

"I must have this door shifted," says some one else. "The door cannot be shifted. It is there," says the producer. "You know, of course, that it won't open," reiterates the voice sweetly. "I can't come in, if I am shut out, can I?"

"Ease it up by the handle and *push*," every one is instructed. "The flat (scene side) won't come down; it has been secured."

This is part of the 'fun' at small theatres, and there were quite a number of such incidents and minor adjustments about the set at the Everyman, because it had been knocked together out of the old sides of many sets to meet the requirements of the play and fit ramshacklewise on to the tiny stage.

Rosmer did not seem to be unduly concerned about the curtain going up that evening; he looked happy as he kicked about one of the sides of his set, to make it come into line. The room he had constructed was like no room ever seen, but somehow it was convincing . . . very perturbing . . . but pleasant. Indeed, beautiful.

Beauty remained the lingering impression; a tall, wide and curtainless window vanished skywards back-stage left,

shadowy stairs wound into a turret back-stage right, and between these features a stout oak door gave entrance from a snow-covered yard. Yet, in spite of the outer prevailing ice and barrenness, pampas grasses raised their feathery heads from a brass vase on the window ledge, conferring a touch of tropic treasure to that unlikely spot. They were proof that some thing once had grown. A decorative high Swedish stove masked trick lighting, and the room was pleasantly furnished in old oak. But in none of these things lay the secret, for the set worked magic and the magic lay in the blue-green of the walls.

> A blue-green which, when lit by amber spotlights, became splashed with purple and this purple built into fresh forms with every mood. So that the walls, although definite, became atmospheric and symbolic. And the room, which was not so much a room as an enclosure, either widened or contracted with the mood.

Mystics call that particular shade of blue, green and purple, Neptunian, and looking at it is said to free the mind. It certainly seemed astonishing that Milton Rosmer should ever have obtained such an effect by merely dipping his brush into a distemper pot. Actually he had messed about and ' knocked ' the green up himself, slapping it on and spending a night afterwards lighting it. His mind and soul had been in the job; that was enough.

Robert took one look at the set from the front, and decided that form and colour were sheer inspiration. He dashed on, and whether it was that the green had freed his mind, or given him confidence cannot be gauged. But from the moment the curtain went up on that last rehearsal, he was charged with a nervous energy which brought his part and the whole play into being.

A tense curbed restlessness and magnificent irritability swept from him till the air shook, because his sentences came in quick, low jerks, and it was actually the *suppression of nervous force* that threw an aura of magnitude about him, an aura of

mental instability. Just as when other characters were grouped by the stairway their shadows were thrown up behind them and changed into an expression of forces, so in the aura of his nervous force *fear* was unloosed, and then there was no holding the play upon the stage.

The first act presaged the cyclone, the second went tearing through the roof-top to all the winds searching Heaven. The third, in spite of the hoarse raving of the Father, the wood-sawing and the doors splintering in on stage, took place on some still bare Nordic farland, where the springs of life are frozen up and the grey threads of fate snapped and unravelled.

The penultimate goal of the soul was revealed in the Third Act, and the end was so fearful that Rosmer quite forgot to call Curtain. When it did come down, he turned in anguish to Loraine's wife, muttering: "If only they play it like that this evening." And she muttered back: "It was the set that put them right."

Robert, himself, rated the set as being as important to the play as the women's performances: Dorothy Dix as Laura, the wife; Haidee Wright as the nurse; Maisie Darrell,[1] the daughter—none of whom could have been equalled in their parts—and as high as his own interpretation in taking the Father to its subsequent sensational success. So many adjectives were lavished on those performances, and the word genius so freely applied to Robert Loraine's, that the production was slightly overlooked. But against no other background could the actors have struck such an emotional note, or conveyed the effect ' as beautiful as it was intolerable ' according to Charles Morgan, ' of pressure within the mind.' Beauty and evil emanated from the walls: in any other room the play would have degenerated into a sordid family squabble, instead of being released into a symphony of torment. Beauty had to be

[1]Dorothy Dix was the embodiment of fiendish ice-cold purpose against the man's welter of emotions. She also contrived to look extremely beautiful, which was difficult in such a cold part.

Haidee Wright was a model of Calvinistic righteousness. She would have died for Master Adolf—the Father—for her heart overflowed with maternal tenderness, but she put him in the strait-jacket for his good.

Maisie Darrell—an actress of very delicate appearance and haunting appeal—had a ' lambent ' quality about her personality that made her very truly Robert's spiritual daughter.

Pollard Crowther.

Adolf in *The Father* during the Quarrel Scene
Everyman Theatre, August, 1927.

present for *The Father* was primarily a Love-story; the hate in the woman was love distorted, because the man's mind and hers had never met: understanding had not spread its saving grace between them.

(In cases where this play has been misconstrued and played for the ravings of hate, as in the provinces, the audience have laughed increasingly from start to finish, and the strait-jacket scene is the best joke of all. Laughter would have been impossible with this presentation, where the combined inter-playing of the cast plunged the house into despair, and then raised it from horror to exaltation. Besides, Robert was almost the one remaining actor who could command: he might make an audience laugh, but he would never *let* it laugh; he had all the old ideas about a player's sovereignity on the stage.)

At the end of every performance he always dismissed the audience with a short speech. It was the best way of disbanding them, and relieving them of too great a sense of shock. Usually he spoke after the seventh curtain call. But one night, something in his other consciousness must have reminded him that he was in a hurry and had to attend a conference, for he spoke at the fourth curtain, and fell in a dead faint on the footlights. There was nothing the matter with him. "He spoke too soon after the play," said his dresser. "Before he had come out of it." The other players agreed with the dresser; they, too, had known their pulses change during performance, and understood that the transition from the play-plane had been too sudden.

Never, after that last rehearsal, did the company lose their performances, and Robert was even able to reach the play-plane on the first night at Hampstead, when he was prevented from arriving at the Everyman until *the moment the curtain was due to go up*. Crowds of dog-racers going to the White City had suddenly disgorged to the back and front of his car, from two tube-stations at Shepherd's Bush, and stopped him from moving forward or shunting out. Fortunately, the play could not start without him, as he was the first to speak, but it was a harrowing experience. Two windows in the car were broken before he got clear on his way.

The wife, who had been with him, slipped quaking to her seat at the Everyman. How much, she wondered, had his vitality been impaired by the brawling crowd; by the toughs who had vaulted over the bonnet of the car while he sat like a steel-graven-image grasping the wheel, waiting to go on. Seven unendurable minutes passed before the curtain went up—the wife was alone for the first time on a first night, all their friends were out of town—and she almost gave a shriek as the curtain rose, for Robert was standing at the window with his back to the audience. Wasn't he dressed then, she wondered. He turned, and she saw with relief that he was complete to his tie—a sympathetic blue tie against an old and sympathetic brown velvet jacket—and that his hair was right, and that he had the correct suppression of the requisite nervous force. For he had told her:

> "*The secret of playing the Father does not lie in letting yourself go, but in having enough power to suppress.* The acts of violence are not climaxes, but vortexes, because the man is the victim of nervous derangement; they spin downwards, uncontrolled, involuntarily out of the burden of his mind. They are not built up effects as far as the expression of force and vigour goes, but spasms from the pent-up suffering within him. Noise is always empty. Force is conveyed by what you suppress."

Robert never vocalised as the Father. In voice his feeling was always under, never over-expressed. It had to force a way out of his tones; which is not to imply that these tones were either husky or overshadowed, or that he did not strike a tenor note, but simply that every note was created by his own feeling and he was not conscious of it; he forgot his voice entirely, except in the third act, where he was careful to *remember* to start off in a hoarse whisper, as this is how madness affects the voice. Then he seethed, and when he burst, the effect was cataclysmic because in physical and mental stature he exceeded what was required by the part. After the crisis, and when he was once strapped in the strait-jacket, the whole of him, spiritually, streamed away. As one of the critics remarked: "We did not see a trapped wretch in a strait-jacket lying there,

but the whole of suffering humanity draining its heart out, deserted and forlorn." And the effect that lifted the house to exaltation was the change from hoarseness to the beauty of his natural voice, which happened automatically with him, owing to the change in thought from madness to normal consciousness again.

But the Father could never be acted, in the sense of being *assumed* as are some parts, and succeed. To move an audience, the part had to be lived through, actually and progressively, throughout performance. That is how it was that Robert often did things that were unexpected and totally unrehearsed. But they were right, because they were the spontaneous outcome of his feeling, and *unconscious.* The Father was always played according to an entry in Macready's diaries: "To-night, *forgot the gestures*, and *was* the part."

And Robert was the Father. Everything he did was a manifestation of his spirit undergoing the agony of the part; and if, again, it is argued, that such agony must dim by repetition, then there was the bitter draught of his past six year's experiences to draw upon; without these experiences he could never have played the Father. He would never have had the comprehension of *powerlessness*, or have known what it was to be forced by circumstances, to suppress. Now, in some curious and other way, he was tasting the sweets of his torments; he was able to materialise them to his advantage—the thwartings, bewilderments, searchings and imprisonment—he was soaring to fresh heights because he could transmit spiritual flagellation.

So it came to be that he purged the soul with terror and with pity, but there is no way of saying how he came to break the heart. For that, Loraine would have to return . . . it had to do with himself. There was something so simple, noble and childlike about Robert; men and women felt their finest feelings were being strangled when they saw him destroyed. His annihilation stabbed them with self-reproach.

"You would draw pity from a stone," a veteran playgoer wrote him.

Critics, at a loss to express this fundamental quality,

compared him to a caged lion; likened the tottering of his mind to the felling of a great oak, *infinitely pathetic*, or said he endowed the part with a remarkable and lovable beauty: '. . . this exile drenched in the fires of despair, yet imaginatively controlled and explicit,' who 'raised theatre-going to the level of a spiritual experience.'

All of them agreed it was the theatrical experience of the time, and most of them that it was the performance of the generation.

But this is anticipating. Few of the chief critics attended that first night at Hampstead, they were on holiday. And the audience gave no signs of undue enthusiasm at the end of the play, except that their applause seemed genuine. The excessive heat of the night and the tragedy had exhausted them. But, as the wife walked from the front of the house to the back of the stage, through the street, she noticed that people were collecting in little groups instead of pattering away home, and that they were whispering as though something had happened.

Robert should have been exhausted: he was drenched from close confinement in the strait-jacket; but he met her with the typical remark: "Oh, how I longed to tell them all to keep their seats and I would go through it again, and really show them this time." He was always so worked up that he felt that at the end of every performance, not only at a first night.

"There is no need," she replied. "The play has so thoroughly shaken them, they are talking about it in the road." The groups were still there twenty minutes later when Loraine fetched his car out to go home. He drove through them unrecognised, they were so intent on their whispering. And in spite of this, and although there had been only two telegrams instead of two hundred, and no Gallery first-nighters—that band of enthusiasts who make or mar a play—the very air they breathed, changed. Something had happened.

Reviews next morning gave no inkling as to whether the play would succeed or not, with the brilliant exception of Charles Morgan. But Robert's happy feeling continued. Pleasant it was for him to lie out in the orchard in the hammock, and relax, as he had not been able to relax for twenty

months. Still pleasanter, it was, when the gardener came in from the village at three o'clock with the mid-day editions of evening papers. There was a notice by A. E. Wilson, who, after praising his work in the past, said: "His greatest admirers could not have expected this fine and perfectly-controlled display of the mind distraught and intellect going to pieces . . . it is acting on the scale of grandeur." And grander still it was, to ring up the Everyman and ask for two seats for the wife that night, and be told there wasn't a seat in the house. Even better, to know that he would be playing again in the evening in a part that was satisfying, and which, in its very suppression of the vigour he had always radiated, gave him a lease of art that was new. Instead of being potently powerful, he was now powerfully impotent: a strange metamorphosis, but fresh, and consequently exciting.

By the end of the week, negotiations were afoot for a move to the West End. Publicity had been good, houses crammed. A woman had interrupted the play at one of the Matinées, crying out from the stalls during the quarrel scene: "Stop. I can't bear it," and had been led out of the Everyman.

The story had crept into all the papers. Then the Sunday Press came out with no uncertain voice, declaring this to be a show that could not be missed, and arrangements for a transfer to the Savoy Theatre in the Strand were concluded. Loraine had to think quick.

He could always think quick when he saw Heaven at hand. There was a danger this time that Heaven might not be entered, because, in spite of all the enthusiasm over the play at the Everyman, it would probably open unnoticed at the Savoy, and fade into insignificance, unless the management could provide a reason for drawing the critics in again. Over this, Fate favoured him. *The Father*, at the Everyman, had been preceded by a Shaw curtain-raiser called *Overruled*. This, Robert replaced by a Barrie playlet: *Barbara's Wedding*, which had not yet been publicly performed, the first night of which the Press could not afford to overlook.

Incidentally, this playlet supplied him with the part of an old, old Colonel who never left his chair by the summer

window and dwelt in visions of the past. It was almost a monologue for Robert. And, not only had he the advantage of showing himself to the audience in two widely dissimilar roles, with a pole-to-pole contrast in make-up and characterisation that was both attractive and enhancing, but the vitriol of Strindberg was off-set by a first sugar-sweet coat of Barrie. It was a master-stroke of policy.

Both plays were on a poignant note.

Curiously enough, one of the underlying themes in both was the same, but the treatment was so different, it was never noticed. The tragedy in either piece was: *This was life as it was meant to be—and this is life as it is.* They even ended almost identically. In the Barrie play, the octogenarian Colonel forgot that his grandson—the hope of the family—had been killed in the War; and heard the boy laughing and playing down by the alder tree. In the Strindberg, a man in his prime, destroyed by the ignorant, cruel woman he has loved, passes into unconsciousness, strapped down in a strait-jacket, looking at his wife and babbling: "When we were young, Laura, and wandered hand-in-hand through the birchwoods together. When we were young. Think of what life was then, and what it has since become. . . ."

The evening was almost unbearably poignant. But it was also revitalising, because Loraine could project the essential spirit. Another factor gave pith to his acting: the audience saw before them a man who would very likely, himself be over-thrown, because he knew not how to arm against the force of little things. This emerged clearly and brought conviction. In all great roles, it is the man behind the actor who is laid bare to the public: the man, behind and beyond all artistry and technique, who takes the message to the people; the man by whom the part stands or falls. And if the audience left the theatre shattered, they also left it transported, because of the nature of the immolation they had witnessed. It gave them food for thought, their spiritual lamps had been refuelled.

To pass to the clarion phrases in which the opening at the Savoy was recorded: "Triumph to triumph," were the head-

lines in the press, speaking of Robert's step from the Colonel in Barrie to the Father in Strindberg.

Edgar Wallace (then dramatic critic of the *Morning Post*) compared his Colonel to Irving's Corporal Brewster in *Recollections of Waterloo*, saying: "His was a far more convincing study than Irving gave of Corporal Brewster, though it be counted blasphemy to say as much. It was a tremendous piece of acting . . ." Charles Morgan said: "He made of his armchair a seat of life and of vision."

Then came all the praise for *The Father*, and this time the real critics were back from their holiday, so the sequence ran: "Magnificent, majestic, relentless." Certainly, Robert's performance had deepened since he had started playing it at the Everyman, and he was now no longer cramped by a tiny stage. He had made a tour of the London Asylums, observing the ways of the insane, and returned with three gestures he had incorporated. The first was an upward forked movement of the right hand; in the second, he went down alternately on his right or left knee, whichever one gave under him with the blackness of despair; it was a movement in which he fell and rose, as some kind of spiritual fight went on. And the third, generally used when the revolver had failed, conveyed in dumb fashion, a ' blotting out.' Yet it was merely standing with the top of the forehead pressed against a wall or door.

These gestures can convey nothing by themselves. They depend on the state of mind and feeling that gives rise to them, and Robert would never reproduce them away from his part. Nor did he employ them every night, unless feeling compelled him. He had the thought of them in certain places, but unless the feeling was there, they did not happen. Hence it was, that of this performance, *probably the most gymnastic that has ever taken place on the legitimate stage*, James Agate wrote: "By resisting every temptation to overplay—and the piece offers many—he brought out all that it holds of terror, pity and wonderment." His antics passed as an underplaying against his wealth of feeling and power for transmitting emotion.

Edgar Wallace dwelt at length in the *Morning Post* on "the genius of Robert Loraine who is by far and away the greatest

actor of our generation." And although it may be said this was because Wallace wanted Robert to come back into partnership with him, Wallace had broken that partnership before he saw *The Father*.

W. J. Locke, the novelist, who hated the play, wrote to him, saying: "You rise to heights unapproachable by any actor I know to be living. If supreme Art counts in this queer now-a-day world, you have placed yourself incontestably at the head of them all."

Charles Doran, of the great firm of publishers, who loved the play, said:

"The spirit of the author glowed all through. In these small days in the theatre your work is regeneration and resurrection, and in the finest age of our theatre it would stand out as superb. The collective voice of all the artists acclaims you . . . The spirit of the great past, the present and the future is in your inspired playing . . ."

And so it went on. By doing something different to the rest of the acting world, Robert was again leading his profession. It was almost an anachronism, for he was carrying the whole weight of the evening's entertainment in two plays, at a time when other leading actors were treading a measure of heel and toe in team-work or walking through detective parts. Stars might not be in vogue, but business at the box-office to see this star was enormous. Proposals came pouring in from every side. Freddie Lonsdale was now anxious that Robert should appear in some new play of his, as anxious as Robert was to appear in any new play by Lonsdale. The Loraine creditors, legion, were unwilling to accept the smallest payment on their bills. Credit was suddenly endless. As for the occasions when Robert lunched at the Savoy Grill, any one seeing the buzz of theatre magnates round him would have said he was the Queen Bee or Sea-serpent, or Robert Loraine. He had made London his.

Thames on fire or not on fire, he kept an even keel. He worked; he was thrifty; he was moderate. No sweeter man to his family could have existed. It was almost as though the malevolence of his stage home had made him grateful for

his own, he was so tractable and domestic. Times had changed, money was coming in. Instead of playing for £10 a week, his salary was several hundreds, for he was on a percentage of the gross, and the Savoy was playing to close on £2,000.

Prestige was accumulating. The fan-mail was overwhelming.

Clergymen wrote, saying that except by an ordination sermon they had never been so touched. Wives were going to reform; they assured Loraine they would in future remember the psychological claim of the father instead of stressing the physical claim they had on their children. There were simple incoherent outbursts; some hailed him as Prometheus; others piled up adjectives; many begged him to revive *Cyrano*; and there were brilliant analyses from men with heavy minds and hearts. Most of the fan-mail came from men. Leslie Faber, who felt he had missed an opportunity, went to check up on the play one matinée:

"Dear Bob," says his note. "I must write to you."

"Whenever I go to the theatre and see a great part, I say to myself: I wish I had that part. But to-day when I saw you, I said: I could *never* have played that part.

"I was a sick man when I came to the Savoy, but your performance swept me clean out of myself. When I see that kind of playing, I am indeed glad I am an actor. God bless you."

Dear Leslie Faber. Of all tributes, his touched Robert most, for Faber was a fine and most sensitive artist, and a Swede.

Then there was a characteristic note from Sean O'Casey, who had never met Robert:

"Robert Loraine,—A friend and I saw you last night, and saw you not; you were a great artist in a great play.

"Strindberg, Strindberg, Strindberg, the greatest of them all. Barrie mumbling as he silvers his little model stars and gilds his little model suns, while Strindberg shakes flame from the living planets and the fixed stars.

"Ibsen can sit serenely in his Doll's House, while Strindberg is battling with his heaven and his hell.

"We thank you and your comrades for your and their revelation of *The Father*. Would that I could see you and them playing in *The Dance of Death*.

Kyrie Eleison, Robert Loraine, Christie Eleison.

"(*Signed*) EILEEN CAREY, SEAN O'CASEY."

And if this letter seems to be written a little on another plane, that was the way Strindberg left most people: trying to catch thoughts that were too quick for them.

"They're bats," pronounced George McClellan, an Irish-American on the board of Associated Theatres (the Yorkshire-and-American-Shubert Group who controlled seven of London's best theatres). He had come in to arrange a transfer of *The Father* to the Apollo. (More than a three weeks run was not possible at the Savoy, which had been booked by an Autumn production long before *The Father* had come on at Hampstead). "Don't ask me to see the show again," repeated George. "I've seen one act. It's the grandest battiest show I've ever seen—magnificent. Bob's bats, the audience is bats, and they would have had me bats completely if I'd stayed. But I came up before they could put me in a padded cell. Still—as padded cells are the latest craze, and people are paying to go batty, I'll take the batty show to the Apollo on shares. Does that go?"

"Not so fast," said Batty Bob, and paused to think up his terms. Because, although *The Father* belonged to the Everyman management, Milton Rosmer and Malcolm Morley could not move without him. And Robert was a marvel at thinking up terms. If he had a failure he would think up his terms. If he had a success, what a chance it was to sit down and think up terms; it was more thrilling, even, than solving problems in quick-change scenery. He always took his time.

The terms he thought up were, that after the sharing run of *The Father* had terminated at the Apollo Theatre, he should rent the theatre at £400 a week from Associated Theatres, for an *indefinite period*. Associated Theatres consented with alacrity. What was better for them than to have Bob Loraine,

the success of the moment at the Apollo. They took the phrase *indefinite period* to mean five or six months.

Robert intended it to mean *his lifetime and those of his heirs* as long as they found it convenient to pay the weekly rent of £400. Three weeks' notice terminated the liability if they should not find this convenient.

As Associated Theatres owned the freehold of the Apollo Theatre, he virtually had the rights of the freehold off them by this indefinite period lease. And all he had to pay for the ratification of the contract was £800, the last two weeks' rental of his tenancy—whenever that should be—in advance. He would have had to pay this if he had only taken the theatre for three weeks.

It was a phenomenal stroke of business. £35,000 and more was being paid in premiums—on top of weekly rents—for theatre leases for ten years. And for £800, which was an advance on rent, he had the Apollo indefinitely. His business flair was awake.

The lease, with the significant words *indefinite period*, was prepared by solicitors, signed, sealed, witnessed and delivered. Robert turned the latch-key in his home at 1.30 one morning, and shouted up the dark stairs to his wife: "Win, come down to supper. I've done it."

His voice was like a boy's. He might be fifty-two years and nine months by the calendar. But he was really no more than fourteen, setting out again from the Sailor's Dive. The ambition of his life had been fulfilled. He was to have a theatre of his own, a permanent home. Harry Loraine had once wanted that. Robert had always wanted it. Who could say now that London would not be his?

CHAPTER XIX

CAUTION should have been their watchword on entering the land of promise . . . before Robert set out to collect his tribute, joyous, all-conquering and intrepid.

The question before them that night was: With what play should he start his tenancy of the Apollo Theatre after the run of *The Father*? Play plans have to be thought out far ahead.

A curious situation had arisen round his dignity. It made him and the wife laugh, but there it was. People were writing to him reverently as a master-artist who had brought them enlightenment. Could he now go on and play a detective, clicking on handcuffs and popping revolvers? Yet crime plays were fashionable and lucrative, and it was difficult to find any other kind of new drama.

"Don't be a fool, man," Edward Elgar had said to him when Robert had suggested playing a detective. (Edward Elgar, Maurice Baring and he would foregather at the Beefsteak Club.) "You might as well suggest that I should run down the street blowing a saxophone. You'll kill your following."

"You mean I'm condemned to be a tragic highbrow?" said Robert. "I enjoy reading thrillers as much as any one. And if this part has suddenly labelled me as a tragedian, I really am best in comedy."

"Let it be Olympian, then," observed Elgar, with a flourish of his long, thin cigarette-holder. "You can't change the nature of your goods, man. You can't give what amounts to a psychic manifestation at one moment, and change at the next into a Metropolitan policeman, because the public would expect the policeman to turn into 'world policeman' or something; but certainly not to be an ordinary everyday inspector; they couldn't bear it.

"But do the public want symbolism and world policemen?" questioned Robert.

"That is another matter," said Elgar. "I've often wondered about that when writing music myself, but," he added, "it's never come to my writing jazz."

Robert didn't look at it from that point of view. He was versatile, and he couldn't see why an actor shouldn't play anything he liked, providing the play was good. Also a fellow actor-manager had said to him at the Garrick Club: "You get all the notices, old man, but what's the use of them? Those kind of highbrow plays don't run long and make money. If you're not careful, you'll become known as a classical actor."

"Now you know," said Robert to his wife, "that would put me on the shelf. Yet I've made more money than any of them have ever made out of a play with *Man and Superman.*"

"Wasn't that comedy on Olympus?" she asked.

The question was, where to find another such a one.

He might have gone to Shaw at that moment when he was so successful; but, even so, Shaw was morally bound to supply any new plays of his to Sir Barry Jackson. Of playwrights who were midway to Olympus, Freddie Lonsdale was by far the most successful. His comedy was scintillating. But Lonsdale had promised his next two plays to Sir Alfred Butt. Wallace was writing a play for Robert. Robert had decided he ought not to play in *The Squeaker* because of the 'dignity question.' He did not mind playing a detective in the least, but others thought it would not be good for him or for the balance of the play.

If only Edgar Wallace would write a play combining *Sanders of the River* and *Bosambo*! That would solve the whole question. Such a play would not impair dignity and it would be a winner. He would write and ask Edgar to give his mind to this immediately. *Sanders and Bosambo* would provide character, humour, interest, plot, variety, a grand setting, a grand story—everything.

And failing that—what?

(This was the conversation that lasted between him and the wife until seven o'clock next morning.)

Failing that—there were only two alternatives: he could either revert to Edgar's detective play, or revive *Cyrano*. *Cyrano* was straight in the line of great acting tradition, in the line of all Edward Elgar had said. *Cyrano* was also Robert's favourite play and part. He loved the romance of it. Eight hundred letters had recently come in demanding a revival. Surely that indicated a public. And *Cyrano* it was to be, unless Wallace wrote a play on *Sanders*. This was what Robert had decided by the time he went to bed after breakfast.

The wife was to go out and see to the costuming of *Cyrano* immediately, immediately—for this was a task entailing weeks of preparation—just in case Wallace did not write Sanders.

And alas! Wallace either could not recapture that vein, or he had not the time. So *Cyrano* it was.

At this juncture, Robert should have gone for finance to the City. His theatre lease alone would have secured him heavy backing, quite apart from the name he was making for himself every night in *The Father*. Adequately financed, he would have had elbow room and breathing space to do fine work; but the curious thing about him was that, clever as he was at making terms when approached, he was not good at approaching. He could not even attempt to set out his good points or to puff himself. If any one approached him, then —obviously they knew his value—the reply was: "My terms are these." And they were always stiff terms.

In this case to capitalise his projected revival of *Cyrano*, he took £1,000 from a friend who was willing to guarantee an overdraft for this venture, and £1,000 from a source who wished to back his wife in any play she was in. This backer believed in Mrs. Loraine's capacity for the stage. Robert believed she could play Roxane. Sarah Bernhardt had failed in the part, so acting could not be its strong point. Cyrano carried the play, and all that Roxane needed was ' good looks.' To his eye, his wife had these; and, although she was a complete amateur and was in addition responsible for dressing the play, he embarked cheerfully enough with her as Roxane.

Did ever a man in the theatre take on such odds? Foresight had flown to the winds. He himself was going to cast, rehearse,

and open in *Cyrano* in less than four weeks: a Herculean task; for it was clear from the moment *The Father* opened at the Apollo, it would not continue drawing to its former high figures. There had been a change in the cast: Haidee Wright had had to leave to fulfil a former contract. The actress who replaced her was very fine, but physically she was too big for the nurse. It was essential for the dramatic tension of the strait-jacket scene that a tiny woman should strap the big man into the jacket and be in peril of her life from any violent movement he might make. This other actress, when standing above Robert, looked big enough to take him on to her knee. It had been suggested that Haidee—in spite of a magnificent performance—was actually wrongly cast, and that what was needed in the part was a bland peasant woman. The bland peasant type proved wrong. It was Haidee's Calvinistic courage restraining her bundle of nerves, and Haidee's fragile figure, that were of infinite value to that scene, and her departure cost *The Father* a good deal. Also, there had been a week's break in the run, moving from theatre to theatre. To break a play's run is always extremely dangerous, and the box-office takings dropped. Receipts gave indications of falling below the limit set for sharing terms, and the Loraine tenancy of the theatre was heralded to start. Loraine gave a jump——

The spirit was *now or never* behind his break-neck rehearsals. Playing *The Father* by night, he rushed ahead with *Cyrano* by day. Had he not known every word and gesture of each part, he could not so much have shaped the production in three weeks. But he placed his crowds from the word *Go*, to within an inch of where they should stand; worked like a whirlwind, never needed prompting, and betrayed an uncanny intimacy with the scenes, as though he had never ceased playing *de Bergerac*.

Every moment that could be spared from rehearsals, the wife rushed round the costumiers. 150 costumes were needed for the production. But big firms between them had over 2000 covering the period. Surely, then, she thought, it would be easy to dress the show from stock—with a hire account to be paid out of running expenses—and a couple of hundred

pounds over to re-furbish and make the capes and plumes super-splendid.

But alas! the only Musketeer clothes that had swagger and precision were a handful left over from Sir Henry Irving's productions: the rest were all cut wide of the mark, to enable them to be hired out for Fancy Dress Balls and meet any date required between the Elizabethan and the Victorian, by the mere intake of a gusset or the slashing of a seam. So that to dress the show from stock, with £150 over to re-furbish, was an agonising process, when each costume had nine parts without counting felt hats and ostrich plumes.

If only Robert could have gone back to Dulac for a re-designing; but there was neither the money nor the time. He had budgeted to launch the entire production on £2,000, and this is how his capital was apportioned:

£800	Keep back in case of failure, to help meet salaries, etc.
£800	Cost of scenery, properties, clothes. (The original production cost over £5,000, without designer's fees, etc.)
£400	Orchestra, lighting and dress rehearsals.
£2,000	

It was a very tight squeeze.

Squeeze or no squeeze, owing to his own first-class organisation, Robert kept to his time-sheet—a scene to be shaped and semi-perfected every three days. At the end of a fortnight he meant to take the company through full-length rehearsals, and, as a reward for the patience and dispassionate command he had shown, it looked as though he were going to make his schedule.

He had never once shouted, grown irritable, or been flustered. It was as though he were concentrating the lessons of a lifetime into his management of this revival. He, whose whole nature had always tried to progress quicker than pro-

gress could be made, had learned to wait for others. And he waited, guided, and carved like a man machine-made perfect. But obstructions were gathering into an avalanche which was to fall at the most critical moment.

The Apollo stage was so small that no extra scenery could be brought on and temporarily set until *The Father* was cleared. This meant he had to wait until the end of the run of *The Father* before he could see and light his sets. And although he had a week rent free between *The Father* run and his tenancy—as a concession from Associated Theatres—that week was to have been devoted to dress rehearsals in the sets. When it came, it was devoted to an entire re-wiring and re-setting of the ' flies ' and their pulleys on the Apollo stage—a need as unforeseen as it was essential.

As soon as these were re-set, the wires jammed. There was a further two days' delay. Next it was found that the stage was too small to take the number of men required to shift the scenes, which were so devised as to make changes instantaneous. So the ' flats ' and built pieces were lightened to allow for fewer stage hands. All this ate up precious time, and piled up carpentry costs in overtime. Robert's tenancy of the theatre at £400, plus fixed staff charges that brought it up to £540, had started long before he could set his scenes. This was a heavy and unexpected charge on the budget, one that would break it completely.

He rammed the final preparations into a thirty-eight hour lighting and scene-striking rehearsal; after which he slept four hours in the theatre—like the old days in the sailor's dive—and embarked on a dress rehearsal that lasted twenty-seven hours. There was a nine hours' interval after this, and then *the show opened.*

But if Robert was immune from fatigue, charged with high-voltage reserves of energy—the stage staff were not. They were worn out. Throughout the first night they kept falling asleep.

Limelight men made comic mistakes by focusing spotlights wrongly, with disastrous results. At the end of the third scene the curtain refused to come down, leaving Roxane

in Christian's arms in the kiss that ends the Balcony Scene, for an interminable embrace. The wires had stuck again, and the embrace became all the more ardent as Christian was balanced on one toe in the ivy up which he had climbed, and had to be held there with all Roxane's strength, or else fall and possibly break a limb.

In the battle scene, Roxane's coach became entangled with the cyclorama cloth, and Robert himself had to go off and help bring it on. He covered up these mishaps with his own verve and fire, but the atmosphere of illusion so necessary to the play and its romance was damaged.

Worse was yet to come, for in the most emotional part of the last scene, just as it had been discovered that Cyrano was dying, three rows of 'flats,' representing the chapel, the cloisters and the sycamore tree in the Convent Garden, started to fall forward on the stage. What had happened was that an old man far behind the scenes had been put in charge of a 2000-watt lamp, which was to be focused upwards at a given cue to light the chapel window. As he had some time to wait before this cue, the old boy sat himself down with the lamp upon his lap and slipped into a doze. Presently the lamp burnt through his breeches and into his thigh. He woke and threw it from him. It caught the chapel it was meant to light, and this 'flat' swayed forward taking the next 'flat'—a row of cloisters—and down they both came on the Sycamore tree under which Cyrano was dying.

The scene was desperately moving; the house was in tears, weeping to words and music reaching their culmination, when the collapsing scenery threatened to engulf the actors. Cyrano rose and straightened the Sycamore tree, went back and straightened the cloisters, held them up until the stage hands had time to seize them from the sides, *and yet never ceased dying*! His gestures belied his words, but his mind and his tones and his lines flowed on. So that what the audience beheld was a kind of phantasmagoria taking place behind the man, in the scene, yet not of the scene, and in no way cutting the transmission of the story.

There was not a titter, not a whisper, not a stir in the

house, only a tiny kind of gasp which passed as the dying man let go of the scenery. Such was Robert's grip on an audience in a great part, he went on and the house went on with him. But oh, the pity of it, that the scenery should have collapsed during the part in which he was most moving!

Next morning the popular press was full of these incidents; it was too good a story to miss. Reports dwelt on Robert's presence of mind, and courage and mastery over an audience, all of which he found very much beside the point, for what they were reporting would damage his business.

People would never wish to come and see a show in which they thought scenery was falling around.

There were, of course critics who did not confine their remarks to the scenery; James Agate quoted Rostand's untranslatable French, and raised a comparison to Coquelin, spilling Coquelin all over the place. Other critics took up cudgels on the other side[1].

However, whether it was due to the sum-total of Loraine's first-night mishaps, or to his amateur Roxane, or to the question heading Edgar Wallace's criticism—"Do the public want old-fashioned poetical drama?"—is not certain. *Cyrano* did not draw the high receipts Robert expected. It did not play to low figures, either, but it had to net £1,600 to clear, and it played to just under. Robert's funds could not make up any loss: off it came in three weeks.

Evidently there was not the crowd of people waiting to see it that the letters had led him to believe, or else perhaps its admirers thought it would have a long run and were not hurrying. Robert did not even organise special prices for school parties (the classic resource of the classics); he cut his loss and took the play off. Afterwards he believed that if he had had a few hundreds to spare to nurse it through the pre-

[1]Perhaps the critic in the Sphere is best quoted: "I saw Coquelin play Cyrano twice and I have seen Robert Loraine play the part thrice. And I prefer the Englishman," said he. "There is a dignity, a pathos, a reverence in Loraine's interpretation which makes the play something more than a fine dramatic presentation; it is an excursion into an idealised historical past. And Mr. Loraine's wonderful voice convinces me that I should derive the same enjoyment from his art if I were blind and that is a compliment to the work of Rostand's translators for most of the play is untranslatable."

Christmas slump weeks, it would have proved a grand Christmas attraction. But had he had those few hundreds in the first place, his play need never have been struck down at the starting-post by an unprepared *première.*

His first venture had failed; and a ghastly blow it was to him, for he had always counted on the revival of *Cyrano*, but he hid it well. Indeed, all through the play's hurricane preparation, its 28 performances and its withdrawal, he behaved like Cyrano himself. He never once complained, he was self-sacrificing, resourceful, and tireless: a very big man indeed.

From being a near-saint, he flashed into a fiend during *The Dance of Death*, the Strindberg play that followed. It may have been just one of the swing-backs to the opposite that were characteristic of his nature, or it may have been that the evil passions expressed in the play affected his mind and health.

He was certain, for one thing, that his wife was trying to poison him, and gave strict instructions for a detailed autopsy should he succumb. Two doctors examined the home cooking utensils and food, and could find nothing wrong; that only increased his suspicions. A reign of terror commenced in the kitchen, until he went off and stayed at one of his clubs. There his indigestion and ' toxic ' condition became worse, so he came home.

. . . . . .

The Dance of Death, which was Strindberg's Dance of Life, was another intense and intimate inferno on love-hatred, and had three characters: Miriam Lewes, the wife; Edmund Gwenn, the lover; and the husband, Robert.

These three were soon caught up by the bitterness of the play and, owing to the unpleasant things they had to say, think and do to each other, proceeded to be on ' no speaks ' with each other. Even dear, helpful, open-as-the-day Edmund Gwenn nursed little wounds and wondered what he had done that Robert should try and offend him. And Robert wondered why Gwenn, of whom he was very fond and who was usually so sensible, should be so queer. They tried to avoid each other, and became shame-faced before each other, because of the play.

It was a misery-maker all right; yet, for all its hell-plunges into the infernal, it was also curiously, insanely and prodigiously exciting, lit by flares of evil, harrowing but self-revealing, thrilling and stupendous. There is no man like Strindberg for exposing the inner recesses of the soul.

The most terrifying moment was when Robert had to burst into a wild, boastful dance—alone—during which he was overtaken by a paralytic stroke, and his wife hissed exultantly over him: "Is he dead, is he dead?"

Now, Robert rarely shuffled round a ballroom in private life. But he was always able to do things on stage that he could never do when merely himself, although this dance was enough to frighten a 'straight' actor, since it was in the domain of musical comedy. Leslie Henson very kindly came to rehearsal to give advice on steps, but he soon shot up out of the auditorium, horrified by the grimness of the play and this 'vivisection of souls.' The feelings portrayed were so terrible, he said, that he scarcely knew which way to turn when he reached the street, he had been so upset by what he had seen.

So Robert was left to evolve his own steps for the blood-curdling jig of the plundering Boyars, and arrived at a kind of stamping fling. How effective it was may be judged from the letters that people wrote him in batches of thirty and forty after every performance, to say they felt they had been in the presence of some elemental force. Heart-beats stopped and eyes closed when he fell. After the fall his face and body were crooked for two acts from a stroke. This time James Agate wrote: "While fully satisfying the eye in this respect, he kept us occupied not so much with the tricks of the crumbling body, as with the sweep of cancerous imagination." "He was superb," said J. T. Grein, who had known Strindberg personally. "He evoked such pity and dismay as can only be impelled by great acting. For once the word great is no exaggeration."

Robert had added another mighty role to his credit which in the opinion of many dwarfed his Father. Not in the opinion of the *Morning Post* critic, however, who wrote:

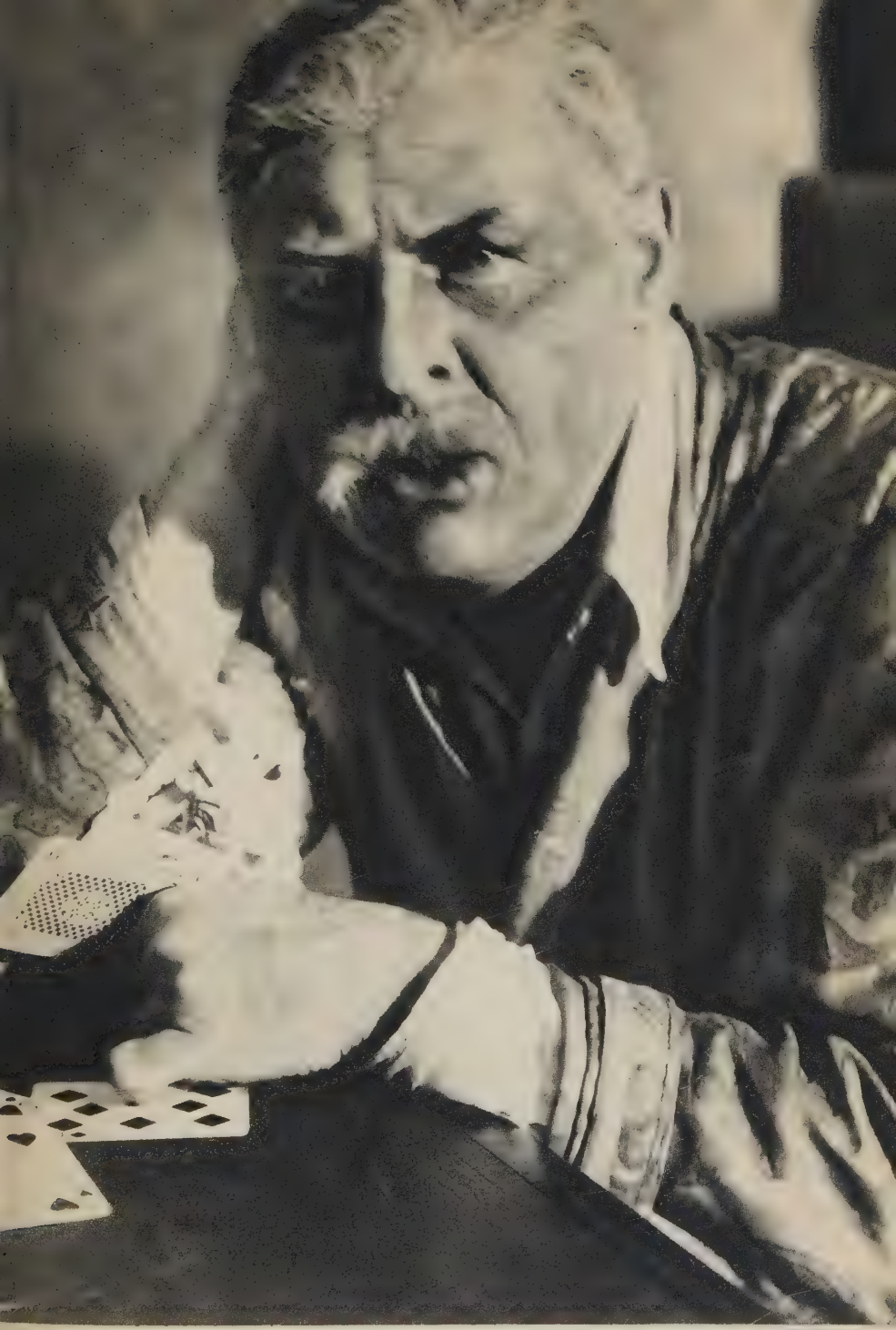
"Mr. Loraine is sympathetic to the core of him. His very voice is that of a comrade. How can we believe in him, then, as a man whose face is phosphorescent with hate." It was not Edgar Wallace writing. Edgar could not very well keep on lauding Loraine when his play was to be next on the list. But Edgar wanted Robert presented to the public as a sympathetic character even if Robert himself chose to play a devil; because Edgar didn't want to be in partnership with a man who was not sympathetic to the public.

But perhaps the most amusing feature of *The Dance of Death* production was the controversy that raged over the version that was used between Baron Palmstierna, who was then the Swedish Minister, and Robert.

These two had set out as brothers to make a direct translation of the play from the Swedish. They took pencil and paper together at the Swedish Legation. The Baron was literary and artistic, and one of the Trustees of the Anglo-Swedish Literary Society as well as an administrator of the Bernard Shaw Nobel Prize Money. This money had been allotted by Shaw to the better making-known of Swedish literature; in his capacity as an administrator the Baron was engaged in revising many of the existing translations of Strindberg—which had incidentally been authorised and passed by Strindberg—and bringing them nearer, in his own phrase, to the great Swede's tongue. The Baron was all out to help Robert as much as he could, but he was adamant about the literal translation of every word.

After five hours' work together, only eleven pages of *The Dance of Death* had been revised. In reality this was quick progress, but not nearly quick enough in view of Robert's commitments at the theatre. All Robert wanted was to relieve the existing and authorised version of some rather clumsy old-fashioned Americanisms, whereas the Baron would argue hotly on the literary merits of "Will you imbibe a drink?" as Strindberg had written it, against Robert's colloquial: "Have a drink?" So Robert thought he would finish his version alone.

Out of courtesy he left a copy of it when completed at the



Maurice Beck.

Edgar in *The Dance of Death*. Playing cards with his wife in the First Scene.
Apollo Theatre, 1928.

the Swedish Legation; but this was as much an act of discourtesy, because he had never informed the Baron that their collaboration was at an end. Naturally the Baron disapproved of the version and did not hesitate to say so. "Although assistance was offered you," he wrote to Robert, "you have on your own hand, with no knowledge of Swedish, ventured to produce a text which is only a haphazard re-writing of an American translation. My sincere advice to you is to put off your production until you have a correct text. . . . I have myself this very day finished the translation of *Easter*, on which I have been working for a fortnight together with one of your experts in English. This was a much more complicated and delicate work than to translate *The Death Dance*, which we had time to do before your first night if you had not broken off."

The Baron had no idea of the financial exigencies of West End theatre management, nor of the necessity, once artists had been engaged, of moving on. Robert did his best to placate him, but as soon as the Swedish Minister discovered that production was to proceed in spite of his emphatic disapproval, the Swedish Legation wired the Strindberg estate lawyers in Stockholm. These lawyers wired the play agents in London:

"Swedish Legation, London, inform us that Loraine will give public representation Strindberg *Dance of Death* in *distorted* form. Have you agreed hereto, or can I telegraph him official protest? Very deplorable if Legation suspicions well founded. Please cable."

The agents cabled that they were very pleased with the Loraine version, whereupon Stockholm suspended action. So the Swedish Legation in London spoke severely to the agents and told them to stop the production. The Baron had already written to Robert: "I fear your text collides with the Berne convention on an author's rights, and that might prove awkward!"

Of course, these Ambassadorial thrusts were regarded as mere pinpricks, and production went on. Then, two days after the first night, the Secretary to the Swedish Legation denounced Loraine's presentation of *The Dance of Death* in a

letter to *The Times*. A week later Robert was shown Stockholm papers which contained virulent attacks on him and his production, whereas previously he had been invited to play in Sweden as Strindberg's greatest interpreter.

It was no longer to be borne. Legal action could not be taken against the Swedish Minister, so Robert gave the story to the Press. Would a British diplomat behave like it over a Swedish production of *Hamlet*? was straightway asked by leader-writers. For two days the details filled the main columns of the Press, and then the storm died down. The Swedish Minister had refused to talk. He had been asked to come and state his grievances at a Lecture at the Apollo Theatre, given by Miss Lind-af-Hageby—a most eloquent speaker and the first person to have written a biography of Strindberg in English—but he declined. Miss Lind-af-Hageby had ranged herself on Robert's side, although they had previously never met, because he had, she said, projected the very spirit of Strindberg. But the Baron vanished behind a cloak of Ambassadorial dignity in London; in Stockholm, a campaign of vituperation against Miss Lind-af-Hageby opened in the Swedish Press.

So it was that *The Dance of Death* created feuds on every side. The play was making a profit. This was mainly due to the very low running costs, for the audiences were not large. They were, however, highly appreciative, and the fan-mail was even heavier than that it was with *The Father*. It seemed as though almost everybody who attended the performances must be writing, and most of the letters started with: "I have never done this before, but I do not feel I can allow the occasion to pass unrecorded. . . ." And, again, most of the fan-mail came from men: doctors, accountants, lawyers, civil servants, for whom the play had a peculiar appeal. Perhaps they, too, felt they could have been Napoleons—like the husband in the play—had it not been for their wives.

But the morbidity of the show was having a serious effect on Robert's mind and health; it was too strong a hymn of hate. He was relieved to hear that Wallace was settling down to write a play for him. Edgar said it would take him no

time at all to write *the* play of all plays, once he got down to it, and he was as good as his word.

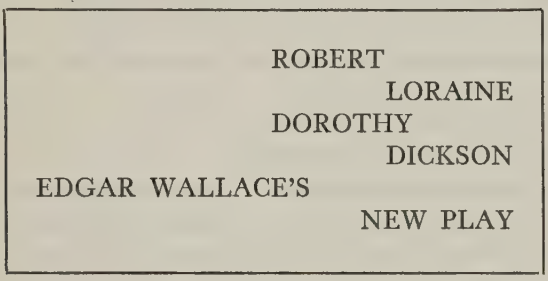
. . . . . .

The first Act of *The Man Who Changed His Name* arrived on a Monday, with a note as to how its light sign should hang outside the Apollo.

"DEAR BOB," said the note.

"Here is the Light Scheme. The name of the play is unnecessary for the lights. 'New' could be changed after the notices into any complimentary adjective.

"EDGAR."



The second Act came Tuesday, with a note: "Dear Bob, I personally think this is very, *very* good. I hope it makes a lot of money for us."

The third Act turned up on Wednesday with a note: "Dear Bob, this is the best of the lot.—Edgar."

"I can't see a play here at all," said Loraine's wife.

But Bob assured her she was mistaken. She was a highbrow and could not understand this type of work.

Wallace's idea had, in fact, been very subtle. He had departed from his usual crime play and written a bloodless thriller in the style of drawing-room comedy. Robert was to be a middle-aged man married to a young wife, Dorothy Dickson, who had an admirer. Her relations with the admirer were innocent but compromising. She becomes aware that her husband regards them with suspicion, and shortly after this finds papers in the secret drawer of a desk which show that

her husband's name has been changed from one that belonged to a famous murderer. This murderer escaped from prison in South America and is still at large. Circumstances point to her husband being the 'murderer,' and having designs on the lives of his wife and admirer, for whom escape is impossible. Once this idea is established the play climbs cleverly from suspicion to suspicion and the bloodiest crime is expected, when the last five minutes are devoted to blowing up the whole show as a hoax. The characters had spoofed themselves, the audience had spoofed itself; but alas! it was the author who had chiefly spoofed himself, because, clever as his idea was, he had not succeeded in putting it across.

At least that is what Loraine's wife thought. Not Loraine. He was completely under the spell of Edgar Wallace, the wizard money-maker. He had no sooner finished reading the Third Act then he received a note by messenger from Wallace.

"Bob," it ran. "There is nobody in the world I would give any share in any play to but you. If this cost £5,000 to produce, I'd be glad to put it up, and be glad to buy your half-share now for £1,500 and pay the cost of production on top. As a matter of fact you'd be a mug to sell your half-share for £5,000."

Now, as it happened, Robert at that moment had not bought any half-share. But he did so at once. Wallace evidently thought the play was good, and Wallace knew. He was not one of those chaps who go mad on an idea and have to write it. He wrote to make money. And Bob badly wanted to make a little money. A bare £25 was coming in to him weekly from *The Dance of Death.* The remaining profit receipts were divided between paying back a tiny syndicate, and laying the basis of a fund which was to finance him in the theatre.

Edgar's play went into rehearsal. The wife went out to see to the furnishing, because a Queen Anne desk with a secret drawer was needed, and she specialised in antiques. Every day she would report to Wallace at lunch-time on her search.

He would be sitting in the palm court at the Carlton,

sphinx-like under his homburg, with a long cigarette-holder in his mouth, thinking probably of everything and apparently of nothing, yet somehow emanating absoluteism. Opposite him sat a man, also in a homburg, whose face glowed with admiration, and whose features had changed under that feeling till he might have been taken for a younger brother Wallace.

"Bob," Edgar would say to him intensely. "Order your Rolls-Royce now. I have one. You've seen it. It's not entirely paid for. But I was seen in it the day before *The Ringer* opened. Result: success. To procure success, you must appear successful."

The wife trembled. She knew that line of talk. But there was no way of breaking the spell, and it was always fascinating to listen to Edgar's theories on 'luck.' He had once borrowed 2/- from the bailiff who was looking after the furniture in his house, and had gone off to the races and gambled so felicitously, he returned to redeem his home with the £130 he had made from the 2/-. Many were the times he had brought off such 'coups.' Against these betting triumphs, the accounts of his early struggles were pathetic. Publishers had bought his books straight out for £50. On some of his greatest successes he had not drawn a penny in royalties. He had written plays by the score that had been rejected. Hearing that, even Robert wondered whether *The Man Who Changed His Name* hadn't been pulled out of a drawer. There was something mysterious about Edgar's work. Not only did he complete a play in three days, but he also wrote on an average of 15,000 words daily in articles and stories, yet he never seemed to be busy. He always took two hours over lunch, attended all-day rehearsals, went to plays, went to boxing matches, travelled around, wrote for newspapers, pencilled endless notes. When did he get through the work?

After lunch they would all three stroll up the Haymarket back to the Apollo Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue, and Edgar would be murmuring half to himself and half to the others, in the pale Spring sunshine: "This play is going to make more money than has ever been made before. And I have

reached an age when I can carry my oats." That was Edgar's little spring song.

Again the wife trembled. Edgar was the success conjuror of the moment. But was this how great successes were made? Could fortune be controlled and conjured by an illusionist? Was this the man who had written *Sanders of the River*, or was he passing through an aberration. Better, by far, than these preparations, had been the toil which preceded *The Father*, the helter-skelter of *Cyrano* and the unholy bedevilment of *The Dance of Death*. Those were realities, these were vapourisings. Oh, for a strait-jacket!

"Doesn't it strike you," she said to Robert, "that no work is done at rehearsals? Edgar watches from the stalls and says it is all perfect; you wave hands to each other and wish each other 'good money,' and come next day."

"If we 'press,'" replied Robert, "he thinks we will knock the bottom out of it."

"What bottom?" she asked.

Robert's attitude incensed her. He was like a little boy in his own theatre. Edgar was master, Robert at his disposal. Edgar must have sensed her disapproval, for he said: "There is a Jonah around. If there is a Jonah, we cannot go on." So she was careful to withdraw.

As for Robert, the whole show was a joyous rest to him from the Strindberg gloom and grind. He was already soaring in spirit on Edgar's inflation, in anticipation of the wealth to come.

"Co-operation," was Edgar's great word. His motto was: "To make profits you share them." To be certain of making profits he shared them out beforehand.

So every day a little present arrived for Loraine in the form of a Duty-stamped letter:

"DEAR ROBERT LORAINE,—This letter conveys to you personally as a gift from me one-third of the American, Cinema and Colonial rights of *The Man Who Changed His Name*"

Or:

"Keep this card (Duty-stamp). It places on record that I

am giving you a 10% interest in *The Squeaker* on all British and Theatre rights. (London and Tours.)"

On other days other interests arrived in other plays. Robert never claimed on any of these—what did Edgar do with actors who did?—but at the time he certainly felt he had made an alliance with prosperity. Even on the day Loraine payed £500 in to the Bank, his half-share of *The Man Who Changed His Name* Syndicate of £1,000, Edgar wrote:

"My Dear Bob,—Don't tell your wife or she'll say something rude about ' my keeping the family '—but I want to say that it will be quite as simple for me to put up the £1,000 as the £500. Anyway it is all coming back.

"So don't bother about your £500 until the extra £500 is needed. Probably we shan't want to touch any capital, but can pay the bills out of profits. But there is a thousand pounds ready for the bank whenever you like.—Yours,

"Edgar."

By oversight, Wallace did not pay his £500 to the bank until a week later. But by nature he was fundamentally generous, and liked to pose as a universal benefactor.

Two days before the first night, Robert woke from his dream of possessing a half-share in a world-beater, to the knowledge that he possessed a half-liability in what was going to be a flop. His theatre sense, which had been temporarily hypnotised, now re-asserted itself. He communicated his fears to Edgar, but Edgar would not be communicated with. He, Wallace, had written a money-maker; and he, Wallace, had never been mistaken. All he could do was to stand in the dim and dust-sheeted auditorium and look at the sides of the theatre and murmur: "It is not big enough to hold all we shall take."

So in this pleasant world of change Robert knew that by presenting this play he was riding for a fall. Managerially, he was charging over a precipice.

The first night came and went. The notices next day were amazingly kind. They were charming to Wallace, soothing

to Robert. Even Hannen Swaffer compromised and wrote a skit instead of a criticism:

"Edgar Wallace had a most enjoyable evening last night.

"He met Prince Henry, who wished him to be presented. He achieved a new record by being applauded when he entered his box, and by bowing to the audience before the curtain went up. Then for three acts he sat laughing at his own jokes and applauding after each act. Then he smiled at his own very witty speech, made in response to united applause. . . ."

It was pleasant to feel this friendliness in the press, especially as Robert was usually a target for well-aimed criticism, and had always had to fight hard for his praise. Now the press were co-operating as though he, too, were a favourite.

Not the Box-office. Business was quieter than the Loraine shows had ever known.

Another little present arrived for Robert from Wallace the day after the opening—a 20% interest in Continental Tours; it was the last. During the following days the letters changed in tone and content.

Edgar became aware of the receipts; he also became aware of certain deficiencies in the play, and blamed everybody but himself. After the second night the letter was:

"Dear Bob,—I can't have the play at the mercy of the mechanical geniuses of the Apollo Theatre, so I am compelled to alter it. The end of the play must be as follows:"

(A few lines of script.)

"That, by the way, is going to be the end of the play as produced at the Deutsche Theatre. Remember your 20% interest." (The interest Edgar had given him.)

After the third night the letter was:

"My Dear Bob,—If there are many more like last night's performance, this play is going to run about two months.

"Last night's presentation of *The Man Who Changed His Name* was like an amateur performance played by the inmates of a lunatic asylum. Every laugh was killed stone dead; every

actor raced through his part as though he had a train to catch. This is not 'pace,' it is sheer wicked stupidity. The effects did not come off.

"The play can only be a success if it is played as a farce and played for laughs. I don't know how you regard it—as a vehicle for yourself or as a money-maker. I am so keen on the commercial side of this play that I didn't even bother to make your part supreme. Every actor in the cast is as important as the other, and unless there is perfect team work, then you are going to lose one of the best propositions in London.

"I have had my triumph as far as the notices were concerned. The question of money is not a terribly important one to me; when the play dies I shall not lose any kudos.

"I must have it played as it was set on the opening night (note: it was); no line must be cut and the tempo must not be changed.

"Every laugh in this play is £100 in your pocket; every laugh that is killed takes about that amount off the play's value. I don't care a damn who scores in this play. It is not a Robert Loraine play, it is a Robert Loraine business proposition. If you shine above all the other members of the cast, then the play must be a failure, because it is not written for a star; it is written so that it may go round the provinces for a couple of years and be for you a steady source of income.

"The intervals between the acts are far too short. The play finished at 10.25 last night. There must be at least 8 minutes. It is heart-breaking to see a success strangled at its birth, and that is just what is happening. There will not be a second *Man Who Changed His Name*. It is to my mind not only a fine vehicle for the actor, but it is a commercial proposition which has no equal in London at the moment.

"Believe me, my dear Robert, I have never made a mistake about the run of a play. I am wishing you a big financial success, but all the wishes in the world will not save that play coming off somewhere about May 19th.

"Yours very sincerely,

"EDGAR."

Then on Sunday morning a letter was delivered by special messenger at Robert's house at Roehampton, in which Wallace had lost all restraint. It was completely hysterical, and abused every member of the cast. Loraine's wife went white with rage as she read it, but Robert laughed so much he could scarcely stop. The tears rolled down his cheeks with mirth.

"It was all so ironic," he said, and could scarcely find breath owing to the laughter that swept over him again. By and by, when he could control his thoughts, and this frightening sense of fun, he explained: Here was an author with a prolific pen who could easily retrieve the situation by writing another play; who was rich, and who protested that money loss and failure meant nothing to him; yet he was raising Cain, when he alone was to blame; and whipping up and informing the man who was only too painfully aware of the situation, as he happened to have lost everything.

He had played in drivel, regardless of reputation or inclination, or any artistic pleasure to be derived, because he had meant to make money. And by plunging for a money-maker he had struck his biggest loss-maker. Funniest of all, his only hope of big capitalising had also vanished. A lover of fine art had returned from America, been plugged by a mutual friend with tales of *The Father* and *The Dance of Death*, had come to the Wallace First night, and had gone away discouraged. That was not the kind of work he wished to support. Now the Apollo Theatre would have to go, as Loraine saw no way of keeping it.

The wife looked at him aghast. This theatre tenancy had been the mismanagement of a life-stroke.

"I should never have played in *Cyrano*," she exclaimed. "It was the first night that did it. I should have been in front during rehearsals, making notes, watching your performance, being your mirror."

"Ssh," said Robert, who never reproached nor recriminated.

"Irving had Bram Stoker, du Maurier has T. B. Vaughan," she continued. "For either business or for art, every one has some one; it is only you who are without."

"Things have not materialised according to plan," Robert replied, invincible in spirit.

"I have been to blame in my judgment of this play," he pursued. "I trusted to Wallace. It never occurred to me he might be trying to work up a success-conviction on his own goods, irrespective of their merits. And probably he has not done so. Probably he has had faith in this play all along. He may think it is his finest work. And he will have other successes, great successes. *The Squeaker* will be a great success when it is produced. And the next play he writes will be even better, owing to this failure. But the successes will not come to us; we have struck a bad patch in Wallace. The partnership will end owing to this failure."

In any moment of crisis, Robert had the power of rising out of himself and seeing the whole. But seeing the whole did not prevent him from taking action. He had subordinated himself, his theatre, and his tiny syndicate, to Wallaces' direction; and Wallace was proving himself to be no better than a spoilt child. It was time these pranks ceased.

Uptil now he had not answered a letter, although Wallace's thrusts had struck home. But now Robert—who never reproached nor recriminated—had decided it was time to terminate. Here it might be mentioned that the Sunday Press notices had not shown the same willingness as the Daily Press to co-operate, and Robert knew exactly what had stung Wallace into his latest exhibition. He wrote:

"19*th March*, 1928.

"DEAR WALLACE,—It is no use being upset by the notices —you ought to know that. But although *The Man Who Changed His Name* has played to nearly as much money as my last revival of *Cyrano* in its first five performances, this is attributable mainly to the temporary glamour of your name; it is no use disguising the fact that the play does not send the audience away satisfied.

"The reason is not that the play is bad, but because:

(*a*) The end is abrupt and inconclusive.

(*b*) The play is too short for a full evening's entertainment.

(*c*) Your suggestion of acting slowly and prolonging the intervals is absurd.

(*d*) Your inexperienced and uncertain direction has given the performance an unsure touch which blurs the situations and robs them of their full effect.

"These defects could be remedied if it were not for your colossal self-complacence—of which I warned you at the last rehearsals—and your insistence on taking full control of the production.

"Dual control is rarely satisfactory, and with two such people as you and me it is impracticable; that is why I submitted the whole enterprise to your dictation and responsibility.

"Your expressions of complete satisfaction with your result, before the first performance, reassured me to some extent, because I had confidence in your judgment. The result has shown that my confidence was pathetically misplaced.

"From considerations of personal affection and esteem, I am ignoring your letter of Sunday. It is the kindest thing to do, and I feel sure you would not have written it if you were quite in your senses, especially where you blame Miss Dickson so very severely for forgetting to switch off the lights in the nervousness of doing a new ending at short notice.

"I am afraid your optimistic hope of a two months' run will be sadly disappointed.

"It is a blow to me, as I hoped for at least a short respite from rehearsals; whereas I am now, of course, compelled to go right ahead with my new production.—Yours truly,

"ROBERT LORAINE."

There was, of course, no new production. There was nothing in view but a termination of the theatre tenancy: the end. But Loraine had counted without Wallace. It so happened that nothing at that moment would have been more inconvenient to Edgar than an open failure. He came forward with a proposal to buy Robert's half-share in the play for £2,000. He also paid for the production and rented the Apollo

from Robert for six months at a small profit rental. Robert left the cast as soon as Edgar could replace him.

Wallace said later that his venture with Robert Loraine had cost him £6,000. Of that, £3,000 went in running the play to almost empty houses for nine weeks, without Robert; the remainder in the cost of production. But Wallace re-couped this and more when he produced *The Squeaker*. Besides, Edgar could always find backing when he wanted it, people had such faith in his writings. Edgar had exercised showmanship.

Robert had paid his little syndicate back every penny they had invested—an unusually honest proceeding in the theatre; and his precious Apollo had been saved for him.

He had not gone bankrupt; but he was out.

CHAPTER XX

How hard it is to retrieve a mistake.

For a few days relief from the cares of theatre management was so great that nothing else mattered. Then came the question: What was he to play.

In point of fact Robert was due to go into a film, but that was a side-issue; when the film was completed he had to come back in a play. And it had to be a modern comedy, because he had stepped out of Edgar's so-called comedy, the failure of which would be attributed to him because it would be thought he could only fit into grim classical roles.

Unless Robert could be *ordinary*, he would be beached out of fashionable shallow entertainment. Unless he could sparkle in some light drama which would make the audience forget themselves while they were in the theatre, and then go out and forget the play—if they so wished—instead of being harrowed by conflicting emotions which lived with them for days, he and his acting would be left high and solitary.

Or so he thought. He was mistaken. But his viewpoint was genuinely expressed in a reply he sent to the Press on: "Why I am not acting."

". . . You have heard of labels, the kind actors travel under? If an artist makes a success in a part, he or she is immediately bombarded by managers and authors with plays containing a similar part.

"My classifications run roughly thus: *Always* highbrow and intellectual—although I like a bit of fun as much as any one. Swashbuckling, self-hogging, bombastic and rhetorical—this is when I play *Cyrano*. Hag-ridden, tormented, insane—after *The Father*. Curdling in a maelstrom of seething bitterness—as in *The Dance of Death*.

"In every manuscript that reaches me, especially those with fervent recommendations, I read: 'Enter a man of hideous

Vandyk.

Robert in 1930.

aspect '—obviously a part for Loraine—' Hunch-backed, pock-marked, squinting, and lame.'—*what* a part for Loraine!!

"Now, I don't always see myself as these abnormal characters. And I intend that my next impersonation should coincide more nearly to my simple self."

Strange that he, who as a young man, had always wished to do something *fresh* in the theatre, should now wish to return to the fold. He should have seen that a life of varied occupations had built up a personality about him that made this return impossible. But an idea prevailed in the theatre that it was not Art that counted as much as familiarising the public with your type. And Robert did not know what type to become.

Edgar Wallace had summed up the situation in his criticism of the *Cyrano* revival, when he said: "Loraine's acting is always a revelation to me and always something of a tragedy, because the man is built and thinks on the grand scale. And the grand theme with the grand treatment is a rare occurrence in dramatic literature. The modern dramatist cannot handle heroic figures and give them life, and it is a little pathetic that a man of Loraine's quality must go through life waiting for a dramatist who can afford him adequate material. He, by far our greatest actor, is going naked because it seems almost impossible for the modern literary tailors to clothe him."

Now, this was partly nonsense and partly true. Shaw could clothe any one; but most of the old Shaw then, had been hammered to death by repertory companies. And Strindberg had revealed powers in Robert of which no one had dreamed. Owing to the situations Strindberg provided, Robert was able to disclose a man's soul "until the air shook"; and this not by what he did but by the thoughts projected. Wallace, of course, had written the *Cyrano* criticism with an eye to the coming Loraine-Wallace partnership, and critics who might say when the time came that Wallace had given Loraine nothing to act. Nor did he indeed.

But it is a pity that Robert should suddenly have considered this "difference" in himself as a weakness, instead of treating it as a gift. Alas! A most curious thought-wave was sweeping

the world. It was considered 'outré' to be different, to be distinguishable from your neighbour. Women all wore the same cloche helmets pulled over their noses, without a hint of difference. Individuality was at a discount. Failings were extolled; strength of character or body was almost rude; as boring, in fact, as virtue. Robert, old Viking, felt himself outdated, almost prehistoric, and as noticeable as the strong man of the Circus when he goes into the road in ordinary clothes. He had been born out-size, he couldn't help it. He forgot he had a natural dignity which covered this difference and made it incomparable. He forgot everything except an overwhelming desire to be commonplace.

Playing in the film had prevented him from playing Young Marlowe in *She Stoops to Conquer*, for Nigel Playfair at Hammersmith. Too late, he regretted it. Not only had young Marlowe been one of his great successes twenty years before at the Haymarket, but the part would have given him the chance to look young and handsome, and play in comedy that was the pith of comedy, a welcome contrast to the grim roles he had enacted in Strindberg. And there was no one to touch him for ease and distinction in Old English Comedy. Having missed this opportunity, he became bitten with the idea of rejuvenation.

Away he went to a nature clinic and fasted for 35 days and came back with a waist that was 29 inches. He had lost something like five stone, and had discarded his old ideas of lavish portions of red beef, paté de foie gras, and lobsters. These had now dwindled to meagre helpings of red cabbage. He drank frost or dew, instead of cocktails, wine or spirits, for he rose every morning at six and ran barefoot in a bathing-suit over the snow-covered lawn—it was January 1929—turning cartwheels five or six without a break, and handsprings, and generally proving himself to be an athlete. Not bad going for a man of fifty-three, with one lung and no cap to his left knee. He had not been so fit since before the war, as during this—his latest metamorphosis.

The wife wanted him to play *Peer Gynt*. Here was poetry, romance and drama, wild beauty, with music that every one knew, in its right setting. And *Peer* would have taken every

ounce of variety and imagination Robert possessed. It was a part he would have had to fill, instead of either bulging over it, or carefully withholding himself from what he was playing, as he had to do in modern comedy. And if Peer was self-willed and self-seeking, he had a counterpart in Robert; but Robert also had a real gentleness belonging to his great strength that would have brought a saving grace to his Peer. He might have made London sit up to his *Peer Gynt*, but no! No more wind-swept craggy Nordic dramas for him. He had an American newspaper play which contained all the latest thrills, and out-distanced the latest pace.

Most surely it did.

The scene took place in the press-room of a prison. Reporters were waiting for a man to be executed: in due course, the man to be executed shot the doctors who were trying to prove him innocent, escaped and was hidden by a reporter in his desk, while the news-man grabbed the story for his Front Page. The play read like a riot. New York had not known such a success for years. The only reason London had not bought the play was because the managers feared the bad language in it would never pass the censor.

Robert set to work, eliminating language but preserving atmosphere; and in the end the impossible was achieved, *The Front Page* was passed. He, himself, was going to play quite a minor part. He was so determined to be commonplace. These workings took five months. And, since it may be wondered how he was living, as he had not been acting for over a year, he had re-let the Apollo Theatre at the end of the Wallace tenancy, for six months, at a profit rental of £100 a week. He had also fought a law-suit against Associated Theatres, who had woken up to the meaning of the words *indefinite period*, and had tried to break his lease: and he had won. He had conducted this theatre-let and the law-suit while he was engaged on his fast at the nature-clinic, which had meant sitting for hours over heavy business conversations with men who were smoking cigars, while he had had nothing in his stomach for over twenty days; in itself, quite a feat.

Now, he was going to open in *The Front Page* as soon as the

sub-let came to an end. And it was high time he appeared; no other actor ever stayed out of the public eye so long. All the credit he accumulated from successful appearances was dissipated by long absences in which he became a mere name, so that he was always in the act of making a 'come-back.'

First, however, he slipped over to New York to see the American production of *The Front Page*. To his horror, he found he had made a mistake. The situations did not come over as they had appeared to do in the script, and he found the success was mainly due to certain shock incidents and the bad language. These incidents had all been cleaned up for England. Luckily for him, the American owners tried to jump him into higher terms than those agreed to by cable, and he was able to step out.

Having shown great good judgment over *The Front Page*, his discretion failed him over a silly comedy called *This Thing Called Love*. It was trashy, it was trivial, but it duly opened in July at the Apollo. Of all things to come and see him in, Shaw came and saw him in this, and then wrote to him: "After giving the public Shaw, Rostand and Strindberg, *they won't stand tomfooling from you*, unless it is so well kept up that you can laugh them into being pleased right to the end. This play begins well but lapses into sheer conventionality. . . ."

Robert determined to apply the remedy. He decided he could laugh the people into being pleased to the end and began by whipping up his own performance, using a combination of laughter-raising tricks only possible to an actor of forty years' experience. Directly he came on he lifted the scenes and shot them sky-high; gripped the audience's necks as if in a vice, and laugh, laugh, laugh, he made them each time he spoke as though he were the man in the ring. It was a comic *tour de force* Loraine. Each time he cracked his whip—metaphorically—their laughter followed automatically. Yet there were no gags, the tricks were based on intonation and timing; it was all perfectly legitimate, except for those who preferred the illusory projection of a play. To those few the performance was tedious and horrifying. But most of the 'stalls' went home sick with laughter and neck-ache. Presently, they

were dejected as a result of their false laughter, and wondered why they had ever gone to the Apollo.

Fortunately for his reputation, Robert was obliged to revive *The Father* to keep the theatre open. And fortunately for him, he secured the old cast again, without whom the play could not take place. That is, they were the same with the exception of Haidee Wright, whose part was taken by Louise Hampton, who proved herself to be equally fine.

The play had not been laid aside for two years when it came on again, as before, in an August heatwave. But the part was his medium, and the enthusiastic letters and press-praise exceeded the avalanche of the first time.[1]

Offers for engagements subsequently poured in. He could never play in *The Father* and be overlooked. After duly weighing proposals from New York and London, he decided to stay in England, and play in Benn Levy's *Art and Mrs. Bottle* with Irene Vanbrugh. So, he came forward as Max Lightly, Benn Levy's ne'er-do-well artist at the Criterion.

It was a difficult part. One that required the negation of all his qualities. Only a certain charm was allowed to percolate. Then, by the sheer volume of force negatived—like the magnetism exercised by a dark star—the character was shadowed across, as a suggestion, not an actuality.

In its own way, this performance marked as high a degree of skill as he'd exhibited in *The Father*. But as it was unshowy, his artistry escaped the critics, and it required fellow-actors to see what he was doing.[2] But Robert was happy because he was playing a dissolute, 38-year-old artist, who was not in the category of the 'hag-ridden and tormented.' He felt he was returning to the flow of normal parts, even if they did not focus him as the centre of attraction. He was able to combine

[1]As a representative Sunday critic said: "I have seen Loraine in *The Father* three times. The effect produced by the play and the actor gains by repetition. I sat with my eyes glued on the stage, and he never left it. I consider his performance to be the greatest of this generation. Any one with a love for acting must see Loraine. Not *should*—MUST!"

[2]Lady Wyndham wrote him: "Wyndham himself could not have managed it better, and I dread to think what the part would have been in other hands. You made the man possible. Instead of ever 'resting,' my dear friend, you should *always* be acting. Your absences from the stage are a scandal."

matinées of *Treasure Island* with *Art and Mrs. Bottle* at Christmas, himself playing Long John Silver, and all went well except the business of sub-letting the Apollo Theatre.

Here, he was spinning along in a series of short profit sub-lets, that were both precarious and hair-raising, for they were so spasmodic he often had the theatre empty on his hands between lets. This, of course, ate up far more money than he made out of profit rentals. Try as he might he could not engineer a long let. A 'slump' was hitting the world, and theatres were going down first. So that instead of being a profitable investment, the Apollo Theatre changed into the stone that Sisyphus rolled . . . with infinite toil Robert would arrange a sub-let, rolling his stone to the top of the hill, only to see it bound away . . . and down he would go and start to roll it up again, only for some arrangement to slip and the theatre be empty for weeks. Relinquish his theatre he would not. The juggling was frantic. He struck a bad patch in the Spring and Summer of 1930, and the down period resulted in an overdraft at the bank of £7,000. The friend who guaranteed him would guarantee no further. Reluctantly, Robert was compelled to terminate his tenancy and give up his stage-home that had never been a home.

The blow was a cruel one.

Very strange he found it that his master-stroke of policy should have been turned by Fate into a strait-jacket to pin him down. £7,000 was owing at the Bank; a sum that forged ahead and piled up interest. And he had lost his theatre.

The Bank overdraft soon became the first concern of the Loraines' lives. Through it, Robert had mortgaged his future.

He played in *Canaries Sometime Sing* in New York, where the play failed. He played in a film; but this merely carried the family along. The Roehampton house was sold, and this reduced the overdraft by half. It was now a more manageable sum. With renewed hope, Robert summoned his old cast of *The Father*, and with *The Father* they sailed in the Autumn of 1931 to New York.

This time the play opened in a heatwave of 96° in the shade. This alone should have been propitious. The notices were

Pollard Crowther.

Adolf in *The Father* (Act 1).

colossal; but the show was too grim for the 'slump'; it failed.

. . . . . .

New York in the 'slump' was trying, especially with a heatwave that swelled people's ankles to five times the normal, and a show that had failed.

Desperation swept over Robert fiercely, and one evening he underwent a change.

He and the wife were trudging home after the show, shuffling through paper and refuse that littered the streets. (New Yorkers would not pay to have their pavements cleared during the slump). In strange contrast, floodlit domes and crowns of skyscrapers, floated like jewelled bubbles in mid-sky. Yet, down below, these two kicked their way through rubbish. Under their arms were bulging clumsy paper bags. Out of one of these peeped a cabbage; out of another, carrots. But under the vegetables were hidden Loraine's silver trophies; his air statuette, his cups and other presentations. He had taken these over to New York to make the Colonel's sitting-room in *Barbara's Wedding* seem more real. Now, he was taking them back to the hotel in case they should disappear from the theatre during a panic. Panics were the rule during the slump. And these were his only hard cash assets. The Loraines hadn't the money to spare for a taxi. Money was very tight.

Of a sudden, on the hot air, came a breeze with a tang of sea-smells from the docks, and the cry of harbour-sirens. The aching, penetrative cry of sirens, borne right up-town to 44th Street. Where had he breathed air like this before, wondered Loraine, trudging through the night? Where had he smelt that tang? It was once when he was also laden with a bundle. Was it in some other life?

Yes, as a boy in Liverpool, setting out with his few possessions from the sailor's theatre in the docks. Years and years ago. In another life. At that time he had been walking out into the world with his spare boots and his grease-paints. Now, he was scurrying his winnings into hiding. Then—he had been entering Heaven. Now—he had lived too long in Hell.

He would change it all. ALL. Life wasn't meant to be

lived like this. Of what was he thinking to be living like it? Ignobly chained down, a slave to circumstance, sweating his heart out. The very domes of the skyscrapers mocked him; floating like crowns they showed him the way as his feet thrust through rubbish.

Had he been content to crawl like this in past lives, submitting to circumstance, he would never have won the trophies he carried: mementoes which made the past so bright and the present so murky. He almost threw his paper-bag down, remembering just in time that that would only betray its contents. Oh!—how every incident contrived to enmesh him in pettiness. Pettiness. Ridiculous it was to be carrying parcels. Whoever got anywhere carrying parcels? He would change it all. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Shuffle, shuffle through the shameful litter. If he was not careful he would go through a brainstorm. He must soar, seize life by the throat and dominate.

Economy. He hated the word. He took a glance at the wife. She was walking on, looking straight ahead, keeping on and on. She never minded keeping on. But he, he could not think in dreary surroundings. His mind would not function under distasteful conditions. He had to have space.

Better to die than to live hemmed in by restrictions, tied down by an overdraft. Why should an overdraft dictate to life? Bah!

The overdraft was only a mental strait-jacket. Fool that he was not to have realised this before. Outside it were all the noble things of life. Great things to do and think. He would reach out to them. Invest himself with the power and *environment* of a conqueror, and conquer.

. . . . . .

The wife returned to England. Robert was staying in New York. He was going to right the matter of the Bank overdraft and their circumstances, in his own way. He had also embarked on legal proceedings—a suit for breach of contract against a Canadian Theatre-booking Agent—and he would have to stay in America to see this through.

. . . . . .

Luck always followed *The Father*. He went straight into an all-star cast for Benn Levy's *The Devil Passes*. In this he played an introspective Church of England Minister with a passion for atheism. He had one outburst, the rest of the time he sat glooming. Glooming is never very easy. But to what purpose he gloomed may be taken from a letter to him from Channing Pollock, the playwright, who had known him years back during his all-conquering *Man and Superman* tour.

"Rushing in from Kansas City," says Channing, who was spending a night in New York, "and out again to Detroit, I pause to express my thrilled admiration of your performance in *The Devil Passes*.

"I had an interesting discussion of it last night with Bill ————. He said that kind of acting only comes out of thirty years' experience.

"I said that kind of acting only comes out of *stature* . . . out of having heart and mind and soul. It is the kind of gigantic thing we don't get from our modern pigmies. I am proud to know you, Bob! I am coming to tell you so as soon as I get back from Detroit."

Grand fellow, Channing.

Robert thought so and put the note in his wallet. He liked to think it was there. It almost made him feel well for the night. He was so ill most days, he could scarcely drag himself to the theatre.

There were several reasons for this. Worry: for the mental strait-jacket was not proving so easy to lift. The law-suit was taking a lot of his money, and it wasn't so simple to borrow and provide himself with a fine environment, because no one in those days had any spare cash to lend. They were all passing into strait-jackets. And night drinking had returned: because he was Robert Loraine and had survived so much, he always thought he could take liberties with his constitution no other man would. The first war-wound-track began to give trouble.

He worked out all his own pet cures and little remedies, and grew steadily worse during the months he went on tour with the Company. At Chicago he performed prodigies of

valour in a quiet way. He was taken to hospital for an emergency operation of a nature so grave, very few were known to recover. Although the surgeons were waiting for him, and he was running a temperature of 104°, Loraine insisted on investigating and defraying all possible costs that might arise, so that whatever befell he could not become a charge on the company. This needed rather more drive than he had ever had to summon up before.

Four weeks later saw him playing *Man and Superman* at Newport, having made the most wonderful recovery in the Hospital's records. He was playing Tanner with a zest and spirit which surpassed his creation of the part twenty-eight years before. The return to his youth was nothing short of miraculous.

He had scarcely had to look at his part during the three days' rehearsals he had had with the company, it had all come back to him. The notices of his performance were so enthusiastic, he cabled Shaw for permission to revive the entirety; that is, to play *Superman* with the Don Juan in Hell scene included.

Shaw cabled his support to the New York Theatre Guild, who had the first refusal of reviving any Shaw play, and at the same time cabled Robert: "The strain of playing the entirety every night would be suicidal. But if you are tired of life, you may as well die on the stage."

The Theatre Guild had its quiver full of new plays for the Autumn. They could not do *Man and Superman.* Instead, Robert went into another show that looked so promising he cabled the wife to join him. It failed. He cancelled her passage.

About this time, he fought and won his law-suit against the Theatre-Booking agent in Montreal. He was awarded heavy damages. Rejoicing, for here was a way of discharging the London Bank overdraft, he booked his berth for England for the day the damages were to be cleared: so eager was he now for home. But before that day came, his adversary declared himself bankrupt, and Robert was left with the additional expenses of the suit to defray.

This news resulted in a lung hæmorrhage, and his hair stayed white for months.

He went back to New York and played in an all-star production for the Theatre Guild. The play was *Lucrece*. Katherine Cornell was Lucrece. She had long since become America's leading actress. Her popularity was unbounded. No show she was in could fail. And the tragic rôle of Lucrece became her splendidly. She was magnificent, playing the tragedy partly in mime and only speaking when silence could no longer hold bounds. Robert was the chief narrator of the piece. On either side of the stage stood the narrators, wearing silver masks over black robes. One was a woman, the spirit of Lucrece; and the other, Robert, told the action of the play. He was superlative, said the critics, uttering his comments like a voice from the Gods. Be he never so impersonal . . . he moved.

In spite of the star-cast and talent from seven countries that went to mount Lucrece in music, setting and verse, the play proved too precious for the times, and died.

Robert went into another show for the Guild, Eugene O'Neill's *Days Without End*, in which he played a Roman Catholic Priest. It was almost another ' psychic manifestation ' part. Notices held he came nearer expressing what Eugene O'Neill meant than Eugene O'Neill came in the play. The show failed.

Loraine's mind might have given way after this, only that he had gone back to an old hobby. One that afforded a release from the protracted suppression and grind—Flying.

His diary entry on the first day of returning to flying is simple: "How did I ever keep away so long!" But the Flight log-book subsequently is eloquent, for it shows that only on matinée days did he keep out of the air.

Somewhere he has recorded his joy in flying; there is a typescript of his, which says:

"I have stood on the Great Wall of China with fantastically shaped mountains behind me and the Mongolian Plain in front. I have seen the sun rise on the sublime chasms of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. I have watched ' half a world heave up all shiny with dew kopje on kop to the sun ' along

the Magaliesburg range and the Drakensburg. I have seen the moon shine on the lurid fires of Kilauee volcano.

"I have gazed at Fuji-Yama and the Inland Sea: Niagara, the Ganges and the Yang-tse-Kiang. These sights are permitted to the earth-bound.

"But when the cord that binds man to his mother-earth is severed, and he soars aloft into the aerial ocean, then, is he truly born into this world.

"To see the tops of all the Alps beneath your feet: the cragged wall of the Rockies trying to pierce the sky: the battle-line from Arras to Dunkirk flashing with 10,000 guns: or to view the European coastline from Calais to the Scheldt: to see brave pageants in the sky: immense, deep clouds twisting slowly in gigantic shapes, now lakes with islands in them, now fortresses towering mountains high, holding their form awhile, then crumbling, writhing into wisps, dissolving and melting into the clear vast heaven—to see all these and infinitely more, is to feel the psalmist's ecstacy: 'Now lettest Thou they servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen the wonders of the Lord.'"

. . . . . .

Soon he was flying to Hollywood as every one does: Hollywood, golden goal of hope, and, for so many, hope's grave.

In that centre of white villas, bright colours and dazzlingly bizarre flowers, where he had been fêted as a distinguished guest fourteen years before when he might have made any kind of contract, he played detectives in films and men about town.

They were figures with no core to them which his very personality showed up to be the poorer. Said some one: "Why don't you play Cyrano or the Father, or at any rate one of your big rôles?"

Replied Robert: "I hope to do so when I have bought the World-Talking-and-Picture rights of *Cyrano*. I am negotiating for them now."

There was an impression in the theatre and film world that Loraine owned the Talking-Picture rights of *Cyrano*, whereas he only owned certain rights that imposed a deadlock against an English-Talking-Picture being shown without his consent.

The heirs to the Rostand estate were asking a large sum for the World-Talking-and-Picture rights, and Robert was finding it difficult to reduce their ideas of price.

In the meantime he continues cabling Paris, playing detectives, and pushing the *Cyrano* project in and out of film offices, never losing hope.

It was 1934.

He could not think unless he thought optimistically.

It was seven years since he had first played *The Father.* Some one had told him—Charles Wyndham he believed it was—that every seven years, fortune caressed a man to compensate him for her absence and all that had gone wrong between whiles. Surely fortune would touch him, presently. She was due.

Christmas Eve saw him writing this letter to his wife:

". . . They think I'm rather dotty here, because I won't go to Christmas Eve parties, but they're wrong. I have my Christmas Eve with you and the children. In Philadelphia, Cleveland, Boston and to-night, in Hollywood, I have for four years consecrated this anniversary with sacred, loving memories and intensive thoughts towards you.

"And I have been far happier than the jolliest party could make me.

"I start my intensive thoughts towards you when I get up. This morning it was at six-thirty. That would be four-thirty in the afternoon with you. And I imagined preparations for tea.

"I could see Alice with her Loraine reserve, quietly participating in the celebrations with her heart overflowing with inexpressible emotions, that inarticulate love of life which only you can interpret.

"Joan, of course, tries to run the show, and will take offence and huff off with overwhelming dignity if she's crossed.

"Pixie—I must try and allow for her having grown, it is so long since I have seen any of you——"

He tried to set his mind free by *seeing* his family.

Return, he could not. The overdraft had accumulated with interest. It had never been decreased. Where did the money go,

Sisyphus—where indeed! Or was it that he was pinned down by a strait-jacket? He did not know. He was so busy keeping up a show of prosperity.

Futility.

He would not show his wife that he suffered. That letter was never sent. A year later, she found it among his papers, when only pain could come to life.

. . . . . .

The pall—the interminable barrage of failure that lay over all he undertook—seemed to be lifting.

At last.

Three Film Companies were interested in *Cyrano*; Edward H. Griffith was keen to direct it, and two big stars had been approached to play the parts of Roxane and Christian as Robert's name was not prominent in the picture-world.

But it was to the story, the story he looked to make the hit of the Talkie. He knew he could play Cyrano. Indifferent as he might have been on the films in other parts, he would have been bad in those parts on the stage. But once let him play Cyrano. . . .

It was only the Rostand estate in Paris now that was ominously quiet and would give no answer when approached for the Talking-Picture rights. He authorised an agent in Paris to tackle them and was momentarily expecting to hear, when a thumbnail paragraph in the Kinema Trade Papers announced that Alexander Korda of London Films was to make a Talking Picture of *Cyrano* with Charles Laughton in the name part.

What was this?

Had Korda been before him then in securing the World-Talking-and-Picture rights?

Almost simultaneously, Robert received a proposal from London Films, that he should sell his claims in *Cyrano* and play the part of the Comte de Guiche in the picture.

His pride could scarcely stand it. He had made the part of Cyrano his own. And at least he owned the English-speaking rights. Battle joined.

On the one side was the organisation of a substantial

company, on the other a man fighting for a part he held as dear as life. *Cyrano* had come to mean life. It was the one escape Robert saw to a new lease of art, the only return to high-lights.

Out of the hydra-headed organisation that suddenly reared itself, lawyers, agents and intermediaries came at him all day.

We own all rights and deny he has any—is an early assertion from London Films, through their agents.[1] They were, however, willing to offer $5,000 for his supposed rights and $2,000 for his acting. If he did not agree, negotiations were to cease.

A few days later, on hearing that this was unacceptable to Loraine, the cable through agents goes to an offer of $20,000 with a statement that unless the deal is closed within seven days London Films will start litigation to enforce their rights. The offer is made partly to dispose of Loraine as having a nuisance value, they say, and partly because his name has been connected with the play in the past. But they will be forced into taking a very different line of action, unless he abandons his dog-in-the-manger attitude.

To give this message more weight it is signed: Alex. (Alexander Korda), London Office.

Again to this, Robert, at first, did not reply. Agents phoned, called, and dropped notes on him. Intermediaries from one Filming Company and another waylaid him with bright conversations when he went out, urging him to answer.

Finally, he cabled Korda direct.

"I strongly resent that you 'own all rights and deny any to me' in *Cyrano*. Also reference to my 'supposed rights.' Also description of my rights as 'nuisance value.' Also your threat that if I refuse your offer you will issue writ to enable you to over-ride my rights and appropriate my property. Also reference to my attitude as dog-in-the-manger. You have already been informed that I am arranging for the production

[1]In fairness to both parties it would have been preferable to quote from Mr. Korda's actual cables, but he could not see his way to allowing their publication.

of a Talking-picture with myself as Cyrano in America and, apart from this, if I sold my rights to you it would damage the theatre value of the property out of all proportion to the compensation you suggest. You cannot exhibit a picture of *Cyrano* in England or its colonies and I will certainly restrain you from doing so."

Back comes Korda's reply by return, a personal communication to Loraine, in which his manner entirely alters. If phrases threatened before, they now try to conciliate. Oil is poured on troubled waters.

He says he is astonished at Robert's cable: a misunderstanding must have arisen, Korda declares, owing to his intentions having passed through intermediaries, as nothing could be further from his mind than to wish to offend Loraine. Nor can his intentions be misconstrued, he maintains, since London Films have bought the World-Talking-and-Picture-Rights of *Cyrano* from the Rostand estate, and have registered these at Hay's Office; Loraine's rights do not comprise Motion Pictures, yet, he, Korda, is willing to offer Loraine a large sum . . . in fact, although he skims over Loraine's key-ownership of the English-speaking rights, the long cable unwinds into a repetition of the previous offer on more favourable terms.

When it arrived the fight had been going on six weeks. Robert had not yet been worn down, although his days were little more than a series of jagged intervals between phone-calls from representatives and agents. Cables continued to pour in, every one of them hinting at a law-suit, and Robert had no funds with which to embark on litigation.

Film companies he had interested had fallen back directly they heard that Korda had registered his *Cyrano*-film intention at Hay's Office (an office instituted by the Film industry to give Companies mutual scheme-protection) once a film-scheme is so registered, no other company jumps in.

One company alone was still willing to undertake the *Cyrano*-film with Robert, if he could buy the rights Korda had obtained. Meanwhile Robert had heard from Paris that the

Rostand heirs had sold the World rights to Korda, with a provisional clause that Korda would *have to settle separately with Loraine for his English-speaking rights.*

So he cabled asking Korda to sell his World-rights. Korda refused. But Korda's offer now went up to $30,000 for the 'sake of peace.' No longer did he attempt to deny or deprecate Loraine's rights, although the threat of resorting to law for a decision was maintained.

In this connection, lawyers advised Robert that he could probably restrain Korda from showing a *Cyrano* picture in the United States.

Loraine's position looked more and more promising and, still clinging to his dream of filming *Cyrano*, Robert wrote to a business friend of his in London, begging him to go and see Korda and persuade him to sell.

This friend of Robert's was a lawyer and a director of a far greater concern than London Films.

"Korda thinks I cannot fight for my rights," says Robert, "but the moment he is confronted by a friend of mine who will make him realise that I cannot part with a property which is mine not only legally, but morally, and by right of priority —*Cyrano* was a ghastly failure in England, in English, until I did it—he will give way. His rights are useless without my consent, and that I will never give." This is one of three paragraphs which betray emotion in a long, compressed business letter. The other two are:

"It would be madness for me to sell *my rights*, as whatever price I got I would be throwing away a brilliant new career and at least a million dollars I could make after playing the part myself.

"This is not conceit of my performance, but I know the effect *the part* can make, and how one part like that, and there isn't another like it, can place an actor on the pinnacle of success."

This was putting it quietly. His emotions were surging. He could not bear the thought of any one else playing Cyrano, the part he had made his own, and the part which would restore him to place.

The legal friend set to work with Counsel, and discovered a somewhat fantastic situation. That:

(*a*) Whereas Korda and London Films had the sole right to make a Talkie of *Cyrano* in the United Kingdom, they could not show it in the United Kingdom without Loraine's permission, because they would be infringing on his English-speaking rights.

(*b*) Although Robert had bought no Picture Rights, he could have a Talkie made of *Cyrano* in any country where Rostand had no copyright (i.e., United States), and even show it in the United Kingdom, providing he paid royalties to Korda, as London Films owned the Picture rights.

The royalties were the snag. They would be prohibitive.

That was where Korda had Loraine. And Korda would not sell. He thought he had a part for Laughton.

So the legal friend wrote a kind but firm letter to Robert, in which he set out that no film company would embark on the filming of *Cyrano*, faced by prohibitive royalties as a bar to exhibition in the United Kingdom. Moreover, as it was a matter for legal argument as to whether the Loraine rights expired in 1939 or 1948, if the Court held that they expired in 1939, the worst Robert could do would be to hold up London Films in their plans for a few years, whereas this was an excellent opportunity to realise on his rights and settle the Bank overdraft.

He was continually being reminded of his overdraft.

. . . . . .

The overdraft won.

Slowly Robert's fingers unwound.

He sold: and the fact that he obtained $60,000 for his rights made no difference. He to whom defeat was impossible had been defeated. The psychic violation of this to his being was not to be gauged.

The lung hæmorrhages were worse, and other complications set in. The fight had lasted four months, and for another four he dyed his hair to a careful shade of brown. He did not like it white.

He came back to England. The strait-jacket had been lifted.

But on what? He had always believed it would lift on a release, a come-back. How could he believe otherwise when he knew he could still act, and had never lost his power to reveal and astonish. His whole nature had always shoured for expression, and he thought that during the last years Fate had meant to teach him the lesson of suppression: if he submitted to that lesson there would be a reward for services rendered and successes withheld. But now, his last professional asset had been taken from him; he was bereft.

Friends pointed out that the part might revert to him: fellow-actors came up and assured him at the Club, consolingly: "Nobody could play Cyrano like you, old chap."

"I have the right to do it for charity and I'll show them yet," he would reply fervently. Some gesture had to remain with Robert, he desired pity from no one. He did not believe the part would revert to him, fate had lately dimmed his belief in a benevolent chance, but he never 'belly-ached,' to use his own expression, over the loss of the part. He showed nothing. He was consistently cheerful, debonair, and joking, and for all his age and size, so young.

Like a tree uprooted by a storm, which still bursts into leaf in the spring, the habits of a lifetime did not forsake him. There was the wide, sunny smile, the step that rang, the slight swagger of 'I'll stand no nonsense' in the forward thrust of the shoulder. If inwardly something had snapped, outwardly he was the same.

For a while: then he fell ill and was in desperate pain; but still he insisted on attending to his business and going through his part, although no one could make out a word he said. He was to broadcast Scrooge at Christmas, in three days' time, when, of all things to happen, an agonising impediment rose in his throat.

"You know that the last state of Job was better than his first," he managed to tell his wife, trying to make light of it. It was only to her, though, that he ever quoted Job, because she knew the book was his staff of fortitude.

He joked so much the day he was taken to Hospital, that although the doctors did not understand what he said, they

were certain he would be out next day to rehearse. His high temperature should have warned them. But 103° and 104° seemed a mere nothing, compared to his gaiety. "He has such reserves, such vitality," they said. They were mistaken. The core had gone, it was the last flicker of an inextinguishable spirit.

So it was that his high spirits completely misled them. He was passing through a crisis, and at such times he was always invincible. But he left them, and they were astonished.

"It was so sudden," said the sister, at a loss to explain how he went. "He seemed so well. He would not keep in bed. He was going to rehearse to-morrow. He would not sleep. He read his part. And, look at all the other reading he did, a book of heavy political Memoirs. Could any man who was not feeling well do all that reading?" she asked.

Not any man, perhaps. By no means any man. Just Robert Loraine.

THE END

POSTSCRIPT

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W.L.

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